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The Journal of the Alliance for Community Media • Summer 2002

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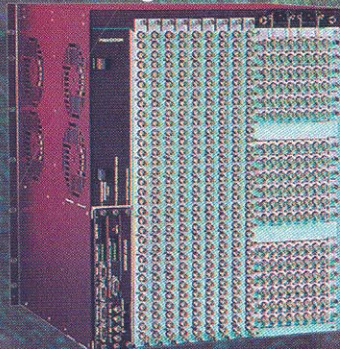
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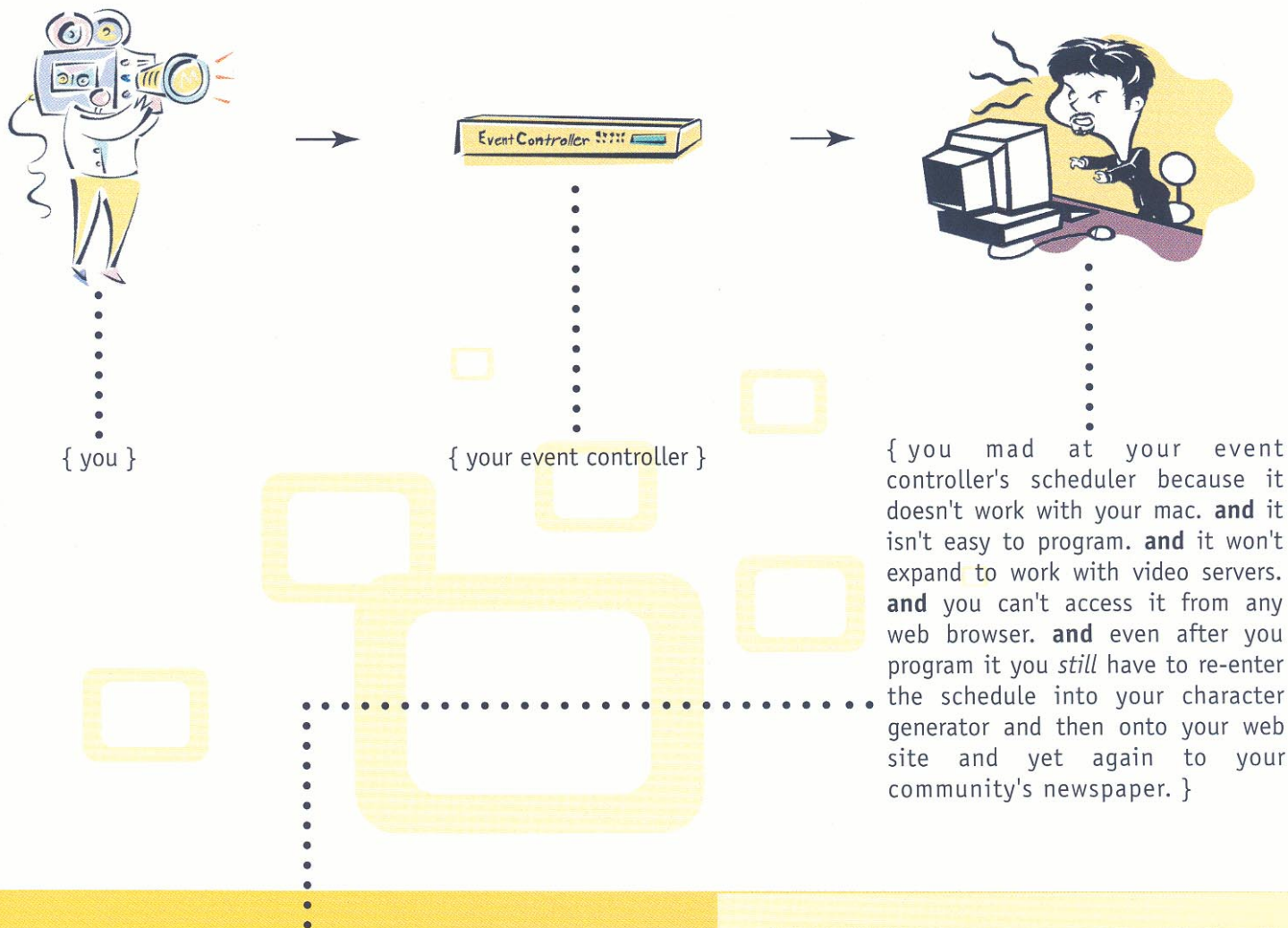
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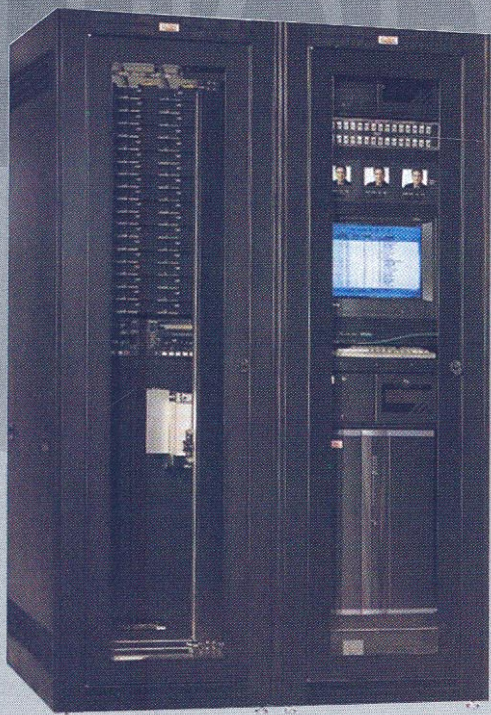
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UPFRONT • PAGES 3-8

Bunnie Riedel, John Rocco, Board of Directors

RETHINKING ACCESS PHILOSOPHY • PAGES 9-36

Introduction, John W. Higgins, 9 /

Which First Amendment Are You

Talking About?, John W. Higgins, 11

/ First Come, First Served: Last One

Standing, Dirk Koning, 14 / *Why*

Centers Abandon First Come, First

Served, Pat Garlinghouse, 16 / *Communications Bridges*,

Eliot Margolies, 18 / *A New Day for Public Access in San*

Francisco, 19 / *Re-thinking Access: Cultural Barriers to*

Public Access Television, Bill Kirkpatrick, 20 / *Integrating*

Teaching and Educational Cable to

Enrich the Community, Campus &

Students, Rob Huesca, 24 /

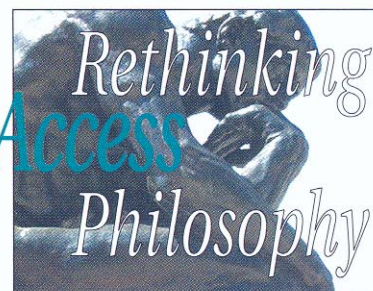
Where in the World is U.S. PEG?, DeeDee

Halleck 27 / *A Guide to Philosophical*

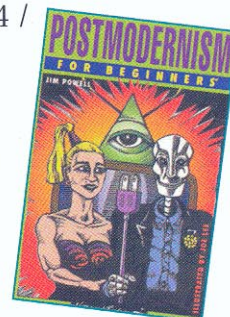
Discussions of Community Media, John W.

Higgins, 29 / *Resources for the Access*

Practitioner/Philosopher, 33



*Teaching and Educational Cable to
Enrich the Community, Campus &
Students*, Rob Huesca, 24 /



On the cover and throughout this issue: "The Thinker" by sculptor Auguste Rodin (1840-1917); original conceived in 1880. Photo by John W. Higgins.

Articles in this issue of CMR are available online at

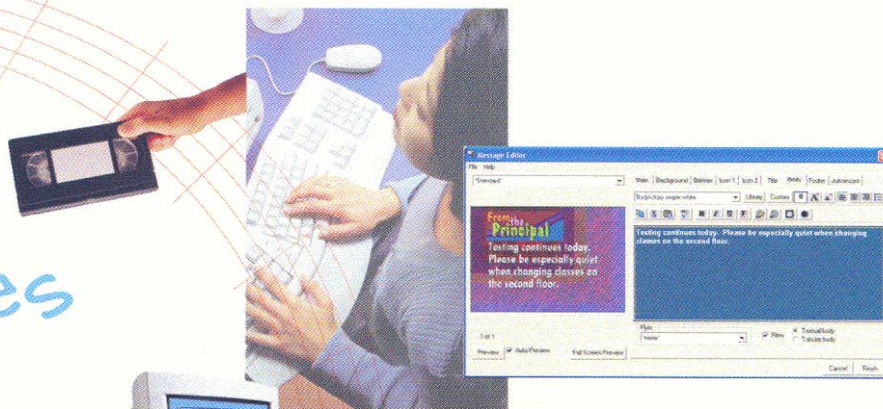
<http://faculty.menlo.edu/~jhiggins/acmwhitepaper>. Selected articles will be available in the future at www.communitymediareview.org

As the journal of the Alliance for Community Media, COMMUNITY MEDIA REVIEW shall support the Alliance mission by providing: a comprehensive overview of past, present and future issues critical to the Alliance and its membership; vigorous and thoughtful debate on those issues; and a venue for members and like-minded groups to present issues critical to the Alliance.

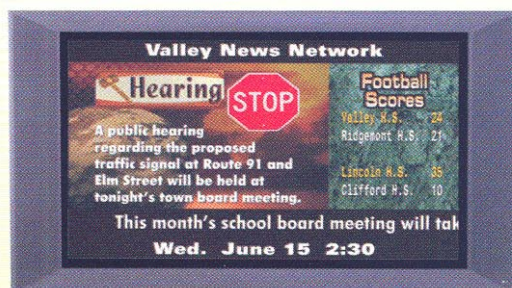


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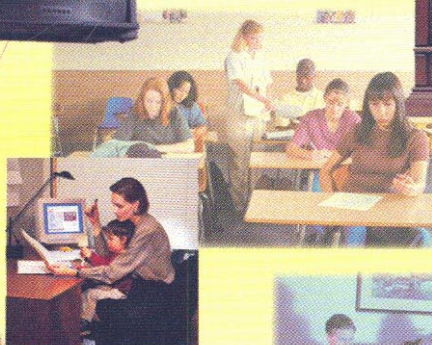
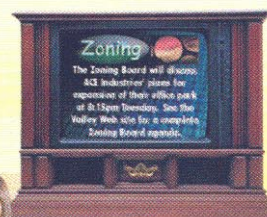
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Forecast for a Long, Hot Summer

BY BUNNIE RIEDEL

I was joking with someone the other day, I said "It's going to be a long, hot summer!" My laughing about it was my way of masking my anxiety over what we have learned is coming our way. Senator Joseph Lieberman is proposing four pieces of broadband legislation, one of them aspires to establish a national standard for managing rights of way. Senator John McCain is proposing an "open access" piece of legislation that will not really speak to the issue of open access for all internet users, but only in those markets where there is no competition (DSL, wireless, etc.). We were told us that on a scale of one to ten, one being no open access and ten being complete open access, this legislation will rank at around two or three. The open access debate aside, our early intelligence is that the McCain legislation will also challenge or destroy local control over rights of way management.

Then we have that pesky lawsuit in the 9th Circuit over the recent FCC's cable modem declaratory ruling, and comments will be filed before you get this *CMR* at the FCC regarding the Notice of Proposed Rule Making the FCC opened when they handed down their cable modem ruling. A "long, hot summer" indeed is what we are facing.

Combine these elements with the recent financial difficulty of the nation's fifth largest cable system, Adelphia, and it's enough to make you want to tear your hair out. Throughout all of these shenanigans, I keep asking myself "What is right?"

Maybe to find that answer, we need to ask "What is wrong?" Following is my response:

It is "wrong" to remove the control and management of rights of way from local communities. Not because local communities are ego-centric dolts engaged in turf battles with the state and federal government, but because it is you and me who pay the property taxes, sales taxes, income taxes, permit fees, recording fees, school taxes, transportation taxes (and the list goes on) to support those local communities. We are the ones who work from January through May (and in some places longer) just to pay our taxes and fees. We

I know that much of this legislation being introduced in the heat of the summer is part of the game. The timing is so these politicians can go back to their constituents in August and brag about what they have proposed just in time for their re-election bids in November. Political gaming aside, it doesn't make it right and it certainly doesn't make it excusable.



elect our local representatives, city or county councils in the belief that they will look out for our best local interests. The state of Maryland, where I live, knows absolutely nothing about the street I live on, and I can guarantee you that the federal government knows even less.

How presumptuous it is for Senator Lieberman to suggest that my local government needs to be told how to manage our rights of way!

It is "wrong" for Senator John McCain to attempt to write a new Title into the Telecommunications Act of 1996, a title that will eliminate the local community's ability to manage and control their rights of way. From what I understand from the meeting I had, the only thing that will be achieved by this new Title will be full employment for the lawyers. The suggested new Title will be in direct conflict with the already existing Title 6 that governs cable. There are only two solutions to this conflict, eliminate Title 6 or go to court.

It was "wrong" for the FCC to classify cable modem as an information service thereby removing any and all regulation of it and eliminating the local community's ability to factor cable modem revenue into the gross receipts of cable operators.

It was "wrong" to so fully deregulate the cable industry that we now are faced with a company run amok, one so over-leveraged in debt that it may never find it's way back. In phone calls I made to the FCC there is a general response that it is not their problem. Well, I too am a great believer in the "free-market system," I too am a great believer in entrepreneurs and capitalistic creativity, but I have certainly noticed that banks and lending institu-

tions are quite willing to curb my spending habits if they believe I am in over my head. Why won't the rules of restraint that apply to each and every one of us apply to these corporations? We are all accountable for our personal behavior, is it too much to ask that these companies be accountable for their corporate behavior?

Some of you have heard rumors that I can get pretty "fired up." It is true. I don't like when politicians or corporate presidents make decisions that adversely affect people's lives or livelihoods. I get quite "fired up." Sometimes there is a "right" and there is a "wrong," and sometimes folks need to be held to standards of decent conduct.

I know that much of this legislation being introduced in the heat of the summer is part of the game. The timing is so these politicians can go back to their constituents in August and brag about what they have proposed just in time for their re-election bids in November. Political gaming aside, it doesn't make it right and it certainly doesn't make it excusable.

I hope that throughout this summer you will join me in keeping our eyes on Congress and the state houses. I hope that you have bookmarked our Legislative Action Center and that you check it on a weekly basis, and I hope that you will take time out of your busy schedules to write, call, email and fax your representatives. This will be one long, hot summer, but the thing I know, deep in my heart is that we have the power to make sure the "right" things are done.

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Do We Really Mean It?

BY JOHN ROCCO

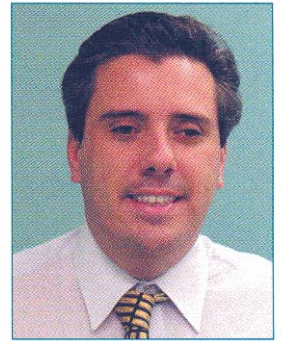
Thirty years ago, PEG access was a dream, a vision, of those who believed electronic communication should be accessible to alternative voices not represented by traditional commercial media. Our country was in economic and international turmoil and many, especially the younger generation, felt disenfranchised. Commercial media didn't represent their point of view and certainly did not allow ordinary people to express their opinions openly and freely. Of course there were the Traditional American methods of stating a position with protests, marches and student sit-ins becoming regular fair on the evening news, but still there was no public forum for common everyday folks to communicate freely, openly, calmly and most importantly, regularly, with their communities. It was a long tough battle for the PEG pioneers who fought so diligently for the channel space we all enjoy today and for the ideal of everyone's right to have access to electronic communication, but recently, the amount of intolerance floating around the access world has become increasingly alarming.

The fact of the matter is, one either believes in the freedom of speech, or one does not. For years we have claimed that access is a forum for "alternative voices", but what does alternative mean? There is no doubt that for many in the access movement the word means a typically left of center political viewpoint. This is totally understandable given that the access movement arose out of the social justice movements of the late 1960s, but three decades have passed and the world is a vastly different place.

Challenges to the survival of PEG arise regularly from Congress, the FCC and state legislatures across the country. If PEG is to survive, the access community must come to grips with what access has become, and, what it must become, in the 21st century. The word alternative in access parlance should mean something totally different in 2002 than it did in 1972.

Is there any doubt that if one is a political conservative living in Massachusetts, you are the "alternative voice", or likewise if you are a liberal in Mississippi or

Now we have a Republican House and a Republican president, a thought which must be unbearable to many, but it is reality, so is it in PEG's best interest to perpetuate the notion by many conservatives that access is the stomping ground for the loony left, or is it wiser for us to establish once and for all, that access is for everyone?



Alabama? The point is a simple one, everyone, that is everyone, has a right to have a voice and to be heard. This is the beauty, and the most important asset, of access. How could anyone, of any political persuasion, intelligently attack the notion that in America everyone of every conceivable political, cultural or religious ideology has the right to express themselves and that communities should have an electronic meeting place for this to occur? It can't be attacked because access represents the most important freedom we have, the freedom of expression, that is of course unless we allow it to be attacked because we, the access community, don't really mean what we say we mean.

Unfortunately, ideological intolerance in the access universe seems to be quite abundant. It wasn't too long ago that one could be sitting in a workshop at the Alliance national conference and hear an access professional go practically apoplectic because the National Right-to-Life group had the audacity to want to run a program on the local access channel. Do we stand for what we say we stand for, or don't we? This attitude is exactly the ammunition needed by those who want to eliminate PEG. We must be honest with ourselves if we are to protect access from destruction, and the truth is that in many quarters, access is thought to be a playground for the fringe elements of society, especially those of the political left.

In 1994 many were stunned to wake up one morning and find out that after 40 years, the Republican Party had regained control of the U.S. House of Representatives, something which even the most loyal Republicans thought impossible, but it has happened. Now we have a Republican House and a

Republican president, a thought which must be unbearable to many, but it is reality, so is it in PEG's best interest to perpetuate the notion by many conservatives that access is the stomping ground for the loony left, or is it wiser for us to establish once and for all, that access is for everyone? This does not mean that one needs to compromise one's own particular principles, but it does mean that we all must respect others rights to have their own, and more importantly their right to express them without ridicule.

Someday soon we will be challenged by attempts to change federal legislation which currently protects access, but there is one potential event that will save us forever. Picture a crowded Senate hearing room where the merits of sustaining PEG channels are being debated. Testifying on the one side are the cable operators who want to stop paying franchise fees and stop giving up channel capacity and on the other side is the Alliance for Community Media trying to protect everyone's right to electronic communication, along with its allies; the Democratic and Republican National Committees, the National Abortion Rights Action League and the National Right-to-Life, the Sierra Club and the National Rifle Association, the Green Party and the Libertarian Party, the Anti-Defamation League and the Nation of Islam, the National Organization for Women and the Christian Coalition, and so on. Which team do you think would win? You see access is for everyone, everyone. We either stand for what we say we stand for, or we don't. We either survive or we don't.

John Rocco is executive director of Dayton [OH] Access Television (DATV) and chair of the Alliance for Community Media. Contact him at john@datv.org

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Channel	Start	Length	Project ID	Project Title	Program Title
62 Sat	05/22/00 20:00:00	0:22:24	1889	Armando's People	Armando's People
62 Sat	05/20/00 20:22:24	0:12:22	1189	Phenomenon	Phenomenon
62 Sat	05/20/00 20:48:45	0:11:14	1671	Program Guide	Program Guide
62 Sat	05/20/00 20:50:00	0:20:00	2020	Harvest Time	Harvest Time
62 Sat	05/20/00 21:00:00	0:16:16	3872	Young Christian Testimony of F...	Young Christian Testimony of F...
62 Sat	05/20/00 21:10:16	0:10:44	1888	Access Information	Access Information
62 Sat	05/20/00 22:00:00	1:00:00	3667	Noche de Sonora	Noche de Sonora
62 Sat	05/20/00 22:00:00	1:00:00	257	Access Information	Access Information
62 Sat	05/21/00 0:00:00	1:00:00	320	Falshide Zone, The	Falshide Zone, The
62 Sat	05/21/00 1:00:00	1:00:00	1677	Rock Club Rising	Rock Club Rising
62 Sat	05/21/00 2:00:00	4:59:00	3006	Classic Arts Showcase	Classic Arts Showcase
62 Sat	05/21/00 4:59:00	0:01:00	1886	Access Information	Access Information
62 Sat	05/21/00 7:00:00	0:58:23	5746	DNA (Defiance Now and All)	DNA (Defiance Now and All)
62 Sat	05/21/00 7:58:23	1:00:00	3036	Classic Arts Showcase	Classic Arts Showcase
62 Sat	05/21/00 8:58:23	0:00:57	1889	Access Information	Access Information
62 Sat	05/21/00 9:00:00	1:59:25	2882	Unlabeled Fellowship Hour	Unlabeled Fellowship Hour
62 Sat	05/21/00 10:59:25	0:00:25	1886	Access Information	Access Information
62 Sat	05/21/00 11:00:00	0:50:50	2199	Living in the Faith Zone	Living in the Faith Zone
62 Sat	05/21/00 11:50:50	0:01:10	1886	Access Information	Access Information

Appointment Book

Start Date/Time	Select Appointment Book Page	Interval	New Reservation
5/20 8:00 a	1	1	4
5/20 8:30 a	1	1	4
5/20 9:00 a	1	1	4
5/20 9:30 a	1	1	4
5/20 10:00 a	1	1	4
5/20 10:30 a	1	1	4
5/20 11:00 a	1	1	4
5/20 11:30 a	1	1	4
5/20 12:00 p	1	1	4
5/20 12:30 p	1	1	4
5/20 1:00 p	1	1	4
5/20 1:30 p	1	1	4
5/20 2:00 p	1	1	4
5/20 2:30 p	1	1	4
5/20 3:00 p	1	1	4
5/20 3:30 p	1	1	4
5/20 4:00 p	1	1	4
5/20 4:30 p	1	1	4
5/20 5:00 p	1	1	4
5/20 5:30 p	1	1	4
5/20 6:00 p	1	1	4
5/20 6:30 p	1	1	4
5/20 7:00 p	1	1	4
5/20 7:30 p	1	1	4

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"There is nothing so practical as a good theory."

*A*fter you've been involved in access for a while, it is easy to burn out on the day-to-day "doing" of access. This presents an opportune moment to engage in the "processing" of access and our personal contribution: *Why do we do what we do? How might we do it better? On what principles are our actions and policies based? Do the actions further the principles or limit them? Which ideas have we found to be bogus, which ideas have been undervalued, based on our experiences?*

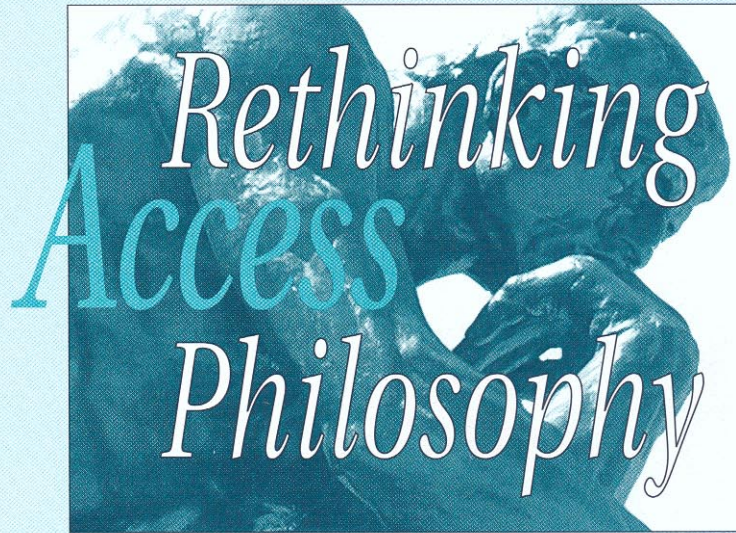
From this interplay of action and introspection emerges re-directed, re-vitalized access practices and philosophies. The process is effective for producers, staff, board members, administrators, lobbyists, policy-makers, activists—in short, for all the constituencies that make community television in the U.S. a vibrant, exhilarating practice.

In this issue, **John Higgins** explores traditional and critical perspectives of the First Amendment, "free speech," and U.S. public access. **Dirk Koning**, **Pat Garlinghouse**, and **Elliot Margolies** address various aspects of the concept of "First Come, First Served." **Bill Kirpatrick** challenges our notions of what is the "proper" form of political discourse; **Rob Huesca** explores a collaboration between educational access and college student projects; and **DeeDee Halleck** looks at the global context of PEG access. Many of the issues these authors address are discussed at White Paper sessions at the Alliance's 2002 national conference in Houston.

In addition, we've included a list of some **Resources** and a **Guide to Philosophical Discussions of Community Media**, outlining some of the basic concepts behind the discussions you might encounter at the White Paper sessions and within these pages.

The thoughts of the practitioners/philosophers of U.S. access have long been represented within the pages of *CMR*, and before that, *Community Television Review*. The contents of this issue address questions of relevance to both practitioners and scholars alike, to lead us to a better understanding—and practice—of community-based, grassroots, electronic media.

— John W. Higgins



John W. Higgins has been associated with commercial, non-commercial, and community radio and television since the 1970s. He is an associate professor at Menlo College in Atherton, California, focusing research on "alternative" media, and an international consultant on communication issues related to the appropriate "packaging" of information. He currently serves as vice president of the Board of Directors of the San Francisco Community TV Corporation, which oversees the city's public access channel and facilities. Dr. Higgins is a member of the editorial board of the Community Media Review.

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EATV, San Francisco, CA; La Verne
Community Television, La Verne, CA

Which First Amendment Are You Talking About?

Speech concerning public affairs is more than self-expression, it is the essence of self-government.
— U.S. Supreme Court (*Red Lion* 1969)

BY JOHN W. HIGGINS

U.S. community video emerged from decades of global experiences with activist participatory projects in electronic media, such as the tin miners' radio network in Bolivia, community radio in the U.S., the Challenge for Change program in Canada, and the traditions of radical documentary film around the world. Within this context, public access television in the U.S. represents a unique achievement for community-based media around the world: the institutionalization of a process that provides people the opportunity to create video programs and air them on local cable channels; an oasis of "free speech" and "free ideas" within a commercialized, corporate global media desert.¹

A foundation of public access philosophy is the "free speech" provision interpreted from the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, which states: "Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech or of the press . . ." It seems straightforward, no? Each of us has a right to speak; through public access we have a personal right to express ourselves—at times, to the extremes of "civil discourse."

Well, yes (following a one-dimensional, unproblematic approach to "free speech"). And no (following long-standing traditional interpretations of the First Amendment and more recent critical interpretations). In this article, I will first explore traditional interpretations of the First Amendment, then look at critical interpretations, and finally how both approaches are reflected in discussions within the public access movement.

Traditional Interpretations of "Free Speech"

While the right of individual expression is guaranteed, traditional interpretations of the free speech provisions indicate that the individual right to speak is not as important as the benefits the collective (society) gains from an open discussion of ideas and viewpoints.² So, the opportunity of each person to express an opinion is not as important as the chance for every perspective on an issue to be expressed...and to be heard.

Yes, the right to hear a variety of ideas and viewpoints is also considered a part of free speech guarantees. The assumed benefits to the larger society from the open discourse is the primary basis for the free speech guarantees. To a lesser degree, there is assumed to be a measure of personal growth for the individual involved in personal expression, but in no way is this meant to overshadow the greater social objectives of free speech.

Among traditional interpretations of the First Amendment, Walter Lippmann reflects the majority position on freedom of speech as a social rather than an individual need with his argument:

So, if this is the best that can be said for liberty of opinion, that a man must tolerate his opponents because everyone has a

"right" to say what he pleases, then we shall find that liberty of opinion is a luxury, safe only in pleasant times when men can be tolerant because they are not deeply and vitally concerned. [sic]

Yet actually...there is a much stronger foundation for the great constitutional right of freedom of speech...[W]e must protect the right of our opponents to speak because we must hear what they have to say...[F]reedom of discussion improves our own opinions. (1939, 186)

According to the traditional First Amendment scholars, "quality of speech" is more highly valued than a simple "quantity of speech."

Traditional interpretations of the First Amendment reflect the assumptions of liberal democratic philosophical thought that are found within the U.S. Constitution, the drafters of which were profoundly influenced by the 18th century philosophical movement of the Enlightenment. Ruggles notes that the Enlightenment was rooted in "faith in the corrective of reasoned debate, and the attainability of rational, consensual truth; the scientific perfectibility of human beings and human institutions, especially through democratic rule; [and] the necessity of an informed and tolerant populace to the functioning of a democracy..." (Ruggles 1994, 141-142).

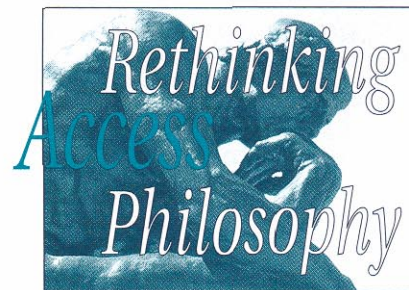
Traditional interpretations of freedom of speech are mirrored in regulations and legislation guiding the U.S. electronic media, including those regarding public access cable television.

Although the basic tenets of public access reflect traditional approaches to the First Amendment, the access canon is being questioned from within the movement by a growing number of critical analyses. These critiques mirror challenges by critical scholars of traditional perspectives on free speech doctrine.

Although the basic tenets of public access reflect traditional approaches to the First Amendment, the access canon is being questioned from within the movement by a growing number of critical analyses. These critiques mirror challenges by critical scholars of traditional perspectives on free speech doctrine.

Critical Interpretations of the First Amendment

Many of the pluralist assumptions from the Enlightenment are hotly contested within the realm of contemporary critical discourse. The critiques provide a vibrant challenge to mainstream thought regarding the nature of power and the exercise of individual free speech "rights." Critical scholars have questioned both one-dimensional and traditional interpretations of free speech, and the basic tenets upon which the liberal democratic tradition is founded.³ Particular attention has been directed to (1) the nature of truth and the structure through which it emerges, (2) the attributes of power, and (3) the characteristics of the individ-



Moving forward toward an expanded understanding of "free speech" and social responsibility in the post-September 11 world involves a reassessment of ideological perspectives.

...public access television in the U.S. represents...an oasis of "free speech" and "free ideas" within a commercialized, corporate global media desert...

ual's relationship with the collective.

Critiques often question Enlightenment assumptions that a single, definable, objective "Truth" exists and that this truth can be known by human beings. Beyond this issue of truth is also a questioning of process and the assumption that truth is best revealed through a dialectic clash within the "marketplace of ideas." For example, Frederick

Schauer reflects the skepticism of many critically-oriented First Amendment scholars in his discussion of the "naive faith of the Enlightenment" that truth prevails over falsehood when the two compete in the "marketplace of ideas" (1985, 134). He notes that,

"Put quite starkly, truth does not always win out...The inherent power of truth and reason was one of the faiths of the Enlightenment, but more contemporary psychological and sociological insights have confirmed the judgment of history that truth is often the loser in its battle with falsity." (1985, 142).

Structural arguments related to traditional liberal democratic ideals of free speech argue that a widespread belief in the dialectic emergence of truth privileges conflict models of communication that are challenged by contemporary thought in fields such as feminist scholarship (Dervin, et al 1993, 6). Conflict models are at the heart of pluralist assumptions of the nature of power, where power (when it is acknowledged) is traditionally envisaged as being shared equally by individuals, recognizable in the form of conflict, operating within public view, and working for the common good. In contrast, critiques of such pluralist precepts describe a process where power more often works covertly for specialized interests and is inequitably distributed within society.⁴

In addition to questions of truth and the nature of power, liberal democratic assumptions of individualism—where the individual is conceived as set against society, thus challenging social domination—are also challenged by critical scholars. Critical interpretations argue that this dichotomy is false; individuals and society cannot be divorced from one another, since each depends upon the other for identity and growth.

The critical project, then, questions liberal democratic assumptions of truth, the structure through which truth emerges, the nature of power, and the individual/collective dichotomy. In various analyses, critical scholars have espoused a more authentic democratic society, rooted in a more robust understanding of the nature of human beings and the social formations they construct.

Public Access: From "More Speech" to "Better Speech"

Early critical perspectives addressing the public access vision of empowerment and related community television assumptions in general typically came from outside the U.S. alternative video arena (Higgins 1999). Within the U.S. movement, analyses of public access as a means of promoting democratic communications typically have drawn from unproblematic interpretations of the First Amendment, emphasizing individual "rights" to speak and "more speech." In the late 1970s early 1980s the level of analyses within the public access movement began shifting to reflect long-standing traditional interpretations of the First Amendment, emphasizing a desire for quality of speech over mere quantity and the needs of the society over those of the individual.

For example, the previous discussion of the First Amendment, which visualizes free speech as a means of promoting public discourse rather than as a vehicle for personal expression, is reflected in this statement by Andrew Blau, former chair of the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers

(now the Alliance for Community Media):

Our experience of public access to cable over the past two decades suggests that access may have nothing to do with democracy—nothing, that is, until the people who provide and use access connect the two. We can no longer simply assume that access to media tools and channels is enough...

[I]f we take seriously this link between the right to speak with and hear from others and the daily practice of democracy, then we ought to organize our access tools to foster a kind of participation that enables people to take part in the decisions affecting their community. In this sense, simply talking a lot means little. (Blau 1992, 22)

This challenge to the established public access assumption that many voices equal diversity reflects Lippmann's arguments described previously. Until the 1980s, such a challenge was also nearly heretical within public access circles.

A further evolution in access philosophy in the mid-1980s included critical perspectives in the analyses of public access and access's role in the active practice of public discourse.⁵ This included a more fully developed conceptualization of the workings of power that challenged the traditional access notion of "first come, first served" with the need for actively recruiting traditionally disenfranchised groups (Higgins 2001). The critiques from within public access, developed in a laboratory of daily practice, represent positive steps to move beyond simple assumptions of democracy and power, toward a more integrated view of access within a complex societal framework. For example, Aufderheide (1992, 2000) and Devine (1992a, 1992b, 2001) have consistently raised critical themes within their work related to community television, placing public access within discussions of Habermas' framework of the public sphere (1962/1989). Aufderheide identifies access channels as "electronic public spaces" that "strengthen the public sphere" (1992, 59) and should not be considered within traditional media measurements such as audience numbers (2000). Devine (1992b) posits that public access provides a space for public debate within the public sphere and argues that public access is best viewed within a notion of process rather than product. Devine further describes access as a site of cultural activism: where traditional power relationships are challenged and where human agency is cultivated as people are allowed to come to voice (1992b, 22-23), "transforming consumers into public



Two announcers from Bolivian tin miner's union radio station, Radio Nacional de Huanuni, conduct the morning news program.

the individual right to speak is not as important as the benefits the collective (society) gains from an open discussion of ideas and viewpoints.

speakers/participants, and moving them from passive into active roles of engagement in the civic life of their community” (Devine 2001, 37). The manner in which public access allows persons to speak within the context of the public discussion of issues relates to both traditional interpretations of the necessity of public discourse and to critical interpretations of power.

Raising the Philosophical Bar

The discourse continues within the access movement: witness George Stoney’s criticism of vanity-based programmers (Stoney 2001) and Bill Kirkpatrick’s arguments in this issue in favor of a recognition of the cultural aspects of media forms and resistance (CMR Summer 2002). Stoney is arguing from the traditionalist perspective of the social good of free speech; Kirkpatrick argues from a critical perspective that views culture as a form of political speech that may be more than the individual self-expression it seems at face value. Or note the discussion within these pages of the controversies involved with the long-time access philosophy of “First Come, First Served.” Or the spirited, wide-ranging discussion of these issues at White Paper sessions at the Alliance national conferences over the past 20 years.

Such discussions constantly raise the philosophical bar in the real-life social laboratory that is public access, testing commonly-held notions of free speech as experienced by everyday philosopher/practitioners, and moving us on to a greater understanding of the possibilities of democratic society.

The ripple effect of new ideas within access are sometimes slow to spread to a wider audience within the movement. A number of people involved in access—administrators, staff, producers, board members—continue to hold tightly to the one-dimensional “individual right” notion of free speech over the concept of “social good.” In these circles, traditional interpretations of free speech have not yet begun to root, let alone critical perspectives on power and free speech. This mainstream approach serves a purpose, when considered as but one among several perspectives on free speech, to be drawn upon as necessary.

The “individual right” concept is easy to grasp and it doesn’t need definition or discussion, since it is plugged into our most uncritical notions of American citizenship. In addition, “individual right” helps us negotiate the deep ideological differences between seemingly alien approaches to the world that we find at the access facility.

In a study of volunteer producers I conducted in the mid 1990s,⁶ Noreen, a European American community organizer involved in public access for six years, described the varying ideological camps at her access facility:

“Well...there’s two groups. There’s the religious right down there and there’s people like me down there and then there’s the ministers who don’t necessarily like women and you get all these different groups of people....”

“...[T]hen you get people there who wanted to do the Klan show I think last year or the year before and you get people in there and when I mentioned that when you are a camera person you are like a fly on the wall and I see two ministers talking to each other and they are saying that women shouldn’t be ministers. That women shouldn’t be here and women shouldn’t be here....”

Noreen provides insights to the potential for conflict that emerge as competing groups interact within the public access facility, particularly within facilities with volunteer programs that encourage people to work as crew on other producers’ productions.

I found that producers devised a variety of methods to deal with the ideological tensions they encountered at the facility. Primary among these strategies was evoking the dogma of freedom of expression, related to the individual “right” to speech, that allowed producers to endure ideological differences that otherwise might be personally intolerable. Internal conflict was resolved in part by resorting to someone’s “right” of individual expression: “they should be able to do that.” Producers often referred to this right of expression, which seemed to be a method of coping with ideals that conflicted with their own. Tom, an African-American bus driver and Baptist minister to a small congregation who had produced 400 programs and volunteered on 300 others over his eight years with access, provided an example:

“...like I said, I don’t agree with everything that they do and they probably don’t agree with everything I do. Like I said, that’s what makes public access to me. We don’t agree on everything but we are allowed to put forth our rights to say what we have the privilege of doing through public access. I believe, like I said, this is—the last soapbox that we have is public access....”

Tom captured a sense of the delicate interlacing of “my rights” and “your rights” at play within the public access facility, and the subtle dance between seemingly conflicting rights.

In addition to drawing on basic notions of individual rights, producers in the study negotiated differences by refusing to work as crew members with producers with whom they had serious ideological differences. But ideological differences were handled differently than personal differences. Tom’s framing of free speech “rights” also allowed him to separate ideological differences from the human being with a problem he encountered at the facility:

“... And when they [volunteers] come on I just try to share with them, and now there are certain shows or programs that I won’t work on. Anything that’s contrary to Christ, I’m not gonna work on it. I mean it’s just that everybody knows that and I’ve helped a man put his starter up. He was a program—his program was not with Christ but I helped him put his starter on. I ain’t gonna help him with his program though [laughing]. But his choke broke down and I helped him with his starter [laughing]. Crawled right up under it and helped him with it, but I’m not gonna help him with his program.”

As indicated by the study, an uncritical notion of free speech framed simply within a context of “individual rights” does provide a measure of tolerance for people as they encounter unfamiliar people and ideas. While recognizing the significance of these basic notions, access should actively cultivate an understanding of and appreciation for the wider aspects of First Amendment ideology—such as the traditionalist notion of “social responsibility”—among producers, staff, board members, and the community.

Reassessing the Access Mission

An overemphasis on individual rights eclipses the more important goals of free speech for the good of the society. Within this goal of social responsibility, producers of “vanity,” “narcissistic,” or “self-absorbed” programming might turn their attention

An overemphasis on individual rights eclipses the more important goals of free speech for the good of the society.

First Come, First Served: Last One Standing

Perpetuating the Open Marketplace of Ideas

BY DIRK KONING

Movement on the flickering black and white security monitor catches my eye. It's ten minutes before the center opens and there stands Ben again outside the door. This retired Air Force man greets us every morning at the media center the second we unlock the doors. He has time, money, interest, a supportive family, literacy skills and transportation. And our center is his "home away from home." Ben benefits extraordinarily from our "First Come, First Served" policy.

April on the other hand is a single mother of two whose first language is Spanish. She lives on the south side of town and works two jobs. She came to our monthly orientation once and loved the idea of producing TV. While our orientation is free, it cost her 20 bucks for a sitter to watch her daughters. She had to hustle up a ride home when the class went longer than the last bus of the night. Our English only orientation was tough for her to follow. We haven't seen April since.

First Come, First Served—Biased

Many community media and community tech centers are struggling with the long-practiced policy of "First Come, First Served." First Come, First Served is inherently biased. On the other hand, First Come, First Served (FCFS) is one of the best Constitutional defenses we have to validate PEG access channels. If the use of the channel is too narrowly defined or prejudiced toward a specific group or entity, the courts may very well dismiss the governmental interest in 'taking' the channel for the public good, and let the cable company have it back for commercial gain.

In *FCC v. Midwest Video Corp.* (571 F.2d 1025 8th Cir. 1978) the court suggested that access requirements might violate the First and Fifth Amendments of the U.S. Constitution. The courts have been expanding First Amendment protection for commercial speech day by day. Cable company attorneys argue that cable is a "telepublisher" and should have similar First Amendment rights as newspapers. For instance, the government can't make a newspaper give a free blank page of the paper to citizens to fill with copy and then make the newspaper deliver that message along with their own.

The last lines of the Fifth Amendment state, "nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation." Here the cable operators argue that if the government interest in depriving them of their property i.e. "taking" PEG channels can be substantiated, then we must pay for the channels taken. (Similar to your land being taken for the government interest of a super highway, the government may take the land but must compensate you at market rates).

Counter Arguments

We argue in the first case that they are not speakers in the sense of a newspaper. Cable television companies are essentially giant routers that pull distant signals in and package them for resale locally. Regarding the second argument, courts have sup-

ported the notion that communities can trade the value of the common rights-of-way for franchise fees and channel space. In other words, if you the cable company want access to our rights-of-way to deliver channels, we the community who owns that property want access to a sliver of your bandwidth to deliver our messages—PEG channels.

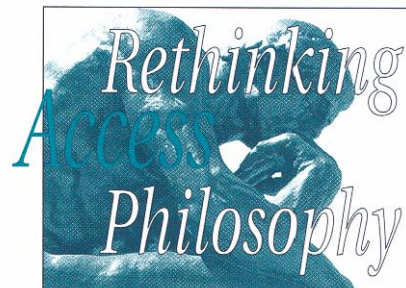
If we abandon First Come, First Served practices and our channels and/or facilities become 'clubs' for use by those we favor, our Constitutional defense for these channels and facilities may unravel. We must provide access to facilities and channels for the common good. We must provide access in a non-discriminatory fashion, we must provide access in a fair and equitable fashion. Even time, place and manner restrictions must be content neutral. We must continue to provide channels and facilities to perpetuate the open marketplace of ideas. The best analogy may be a speaker in a public forum. If someone wants to reserve the city plaza for a rally, the city may allow them to use the plaza on a First Come, First Served basis. The city may not ask to see what speeches will be delivered at the rally. The city may not schedule a group they don't like for really bad rally times (3:00 a.m.). The city has to provide the space for them to speak, but the city doesn't have to provide the amplification system.

Reconciling First Come, First Served

Can you say quandary? How do we reconcile these positions? Should we? Can we distinguish between our facilities/equipment access and channel access? If we stand on principle do we risk cutting off our nose to spite our face? Is it worth it to stand on principle and fall off the funding wagon? How slippery is the slope of editorial discretion? Are the channels worth saving if they aren't First Come, First Served? Is it really about who arrives first or about insuring non-discriminatory practices?

I know when it comes to channel programming, few of us truly practice FCFS. We often have regular series with fixed time slots. We program for convenience and logical flow for the audience. When it comes to facility and equipment access we probably do better on a pure FCFS model. Many centers don't allow folks to monopolize the equipment.

Obviously, the desire for a First Come, First Served policy stems from a scarcity premise. We assume there will be more people attempting to access our services than we can accommodate. In an attempt to be fair, we determine that those "showing up first" will receive first access to a scarce commodity.



"'First Come, First Served' is inherently biased. On the other hand, 'First Come, First Served' is one of the best Constitutional defenses we have for PEG access channel validation."

Additionally, we feel the best way to avoid accusations of discrimination or favoritism can be achieved by applying FCFS policies.

OTHER MODELS

If our main goal is to divvy up scarce resources (channel time and equipment) in a non-discriminatory fashion, what other models might we follow?

Benevolent Dictator: Some one or some group with the alleged interest of the “common good” at heart will attempt to distribute access to insure fairness on all levels. Yikes!

Lucky Lottery: Instead of rewarding those who arrive first with access, wait until all those wanting access arrive and then draw names from a fish bowl to see who gets access to what, when. Logistical nightmare?

Build It and Take It To Them: A twist to the build it and they will come idea, load up a van full of voice, video and data equipment and drive into needy neighborhoods on a schedule like a bookmobile and provide training and production access where ‘they’ are. Could be expensive.

U of M Admissions Policy: Based on an agreed upon history of unfair access, scarce resources (admission to law school) are mostly allocated on merit with special consideration afforded those who may be from a race or class that has been discriminated against in the past. Awaiting Supreme Court Decision.

Techno-Fix: Provide many places for people to “first come” for services and stick with the same policy. Web based registration for channel time, equipment and classes with Internet access computers broadly distributed.

Channel-Facility Dichotomy: Maybe we honor the FCFS approach regarding channel access and we decide to serve the “neediest” folks regarding equipment and facilities. We have people apply for classes and equipment and we totally discriminate toward those who are most deserving of access based on lack of income and power. You be the judge, how many Mercedes do you see parked in front of the Food Bank.

Join the Discussion

These suggested solutions are by no means exhaustive. This article is intended to spur the discussion of this dicey question. Those of you attending the Alliance for Community Media conference in Houston, Texas in July of 2002 may want to attend the “White Paper” discussion to pick up where these comments leave off.

Under all circumstances keep one motive pure, Power to the People!

Dirk Koning is the founding director of the Community Media Center in Grand Rapids Michigan. He chairs the editorial board of Community Media Review and is a founder and current president of the Alliance for Communications Democracy. He travels and speaks extensively on social applications of media. Contact him at dirk@grcmc.org.

This article will be presented in a White Paper session at the 2002 national conference of the Alliance for Community Media in Houston.

Which First Amendment...

continued from page 13

to helping other, yet-unheard voices express their views.

Within some access communities, there has been an increased recognition of the need for greater discipline and more responsibility on the part of access participants. This latter perspective seems to be a consideration of some access managers who have encountered difficulties with producers pushing the limits of the individual right to speech as applied to public access—including “hate speech” and graphic pornographic and/or exceedingly violent programming.⁶ These leaders have attempted to cultivate an atmosphere where the emphasis is on assisting others, including previously silenced voices, to “speak” and be heard, rather than exercising one’s own “rights” to expression.

While the U.S. community television movement as a whole has begun to reflect more complex positions regarding notions of “free speech,” there is no reason to believe that such perspectives will be considered or embraced by access staff and community participants any more rapidly than by the U.S. general population.⁸ Community television leaders might move the discourse forward with high profile discussions of the access mission and the nature of democracy; such a progressive development would be in keeping with the framework of “access as process” espoused by Devine (1992b), Higgins (1999), and Johnson (1994), emphasizing access’s ability to encourage participants to an expanding involvement in the social sphere.

Moving forward toward an expanded understanding of “free speech” and social responsibility in the post-September 11 world involves a reassessment of ideological perspectives—by talking at every opportunity about the basic ideas of the access mission; the many meanings of the term “free speech”; the need for self-discipline and the sharing of resources, knowledge, and skills to create a true public discourse on our community television channels.

Such an endeavor would allow public access, as an institutionalized form of community media in the U.S., to remain as a vibrant living laboratory to the world, contributing an enhanced understanding of the nature of “free speech,” the manner in which the concept works in everyday practice, and its importance to the lifeblood of a democratic society.

Notes

¹ This article is drawn from the chapter, “Living Tolerance: U.S. Public Access Producers and the Practices of ‘Free Speech,’ in *Community Media: International Perspectives*. Ed. Linda Fuller. In press. 2002.

² Traditional approaches to the First Amendment are represented by Lippmann (1939), Meiklejohn (1948), Mill (1859/1993), and Ruggles (1994).

³ Critical interpretations of the First Amendment and free speech are represented by Dervin and Clark (1993); Downing (1999); Ruggles (1994); Schauer (1985); and Streeter (1990).

⁴ Drawn from Lukes (1974) Good (1989), and Gramsci (1946/1989)

⁵ See Higgins (2001).

⁶ For details see Higgins (1999, 2002).

⁷ On the San Francisco public access channel, a few community producers exhibit the extremes to which the notion of free speech as an

Why Centers Abandon First-Come, First-Served

BY PAT GARLINGHOUSE

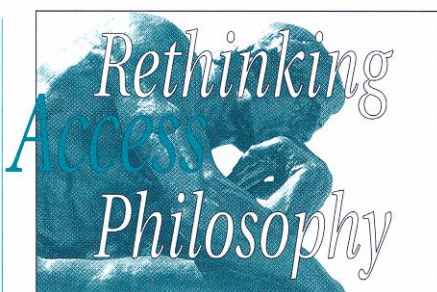
*F*irst Come, First Served" (FCFS) is a management strategy with the goal of providing the opportunity for fair access, but "FCFS" may not necessarily be the best tool. Just because people have the proximity and leisure time to stand in line and fill up the queue doesn't give them the right to monopolize the channel. Access managers may, and often do, find that the demographics of their users do not reflect the demographics of their service area—an indicator that equal access does not exist. The desired result is equitable service. Logic supports an access manager's need to engage in outreach to ensure that diverse communities gain access. Equal access exists only when everyone has an equal opportunity for access. "FCFS" just lets the first one who gets to the service use it. So much has been made of "FCFS" that it has taken on a divine connotation but the invariable issue is control of content not control of order.

PEG and the First Amendment

Public, Educational and Government (PEG) Access struggles to gain identity throughout the country. Education access and generally government access get bandwidth; public access gets franchise funding in exchange for the use of public property. The First Amendment guarantees that all speech will be heard on public access, but the First Amendment does not say anything about the order of that speech.

Valuable programming, programming that can capture the imagination and support for access from the public, requires that the public knows what kind of content to look for and to make decisions about what they want to watch. Gaining public support does not require content decisions but requires scheduling decisions. If managers want to give the public an inkling about the programming, then FCFS is not the preferred method. FCFS robs the public of choice—the choice of knowing, for example, what to watch in advance or when to tape a program. Someone must make decisions in order to give the public a choice.

Access managers have a responsibility to users, viewers and the non-viewing



The essence of one's public access operation must remain steadfast to the First Amendment. The day-to-day operation, in order for the service to remain relevant to community needs, may dictate that many services are not well served by strict FCFS management.

public alike. Each constituent's needs should be met. Each participant's rights should hold the same relevant weight. No one group should be able to exert pressure on management for a particular programming philosophy. Making decisions is in the best interest of the users, viewers and the public. It's good management to let people know what's happening. Accordingly, the best way to protect and justify management decisions is to disseminate adequate and clear information about programming policies and procedures. People feel in control when they know the rules.

FCFS as a Management Tool

Traditionally FCFS was used by managers to avoid having to justify their programming decisions fearing criticism from the public. Deciding on a fair scheduling scheme is difficult but critical to serve the public. FCFS does not provide equitable access for those who cannot compete equally. FCFS provides a substitute for programming decisions. Someone has to make decisions because events come up that can't be moved or changed: late breaking news and time sensitive programming, for example, so any manager will have to justify decisions that cannot be decided by lottery, the fastest or easiest method, or by the person with the most information or advantage. Good management decisions cannot be made if slots are given at random. Nor should management decisions be abdicat-

ed in deference to an imagined component of First Amendment rights. FCFS does not enhance First Amendment rights but it does take away choice from the viewers. Once the distinction is clear, any manager can schedule programming on the access channel in the best interest of the public. The general public needs to know that access is responsible and delivering the best possible service.

The Public Access Mission

Educational and Government access have very distinct and limited missions. Public access does not. Public access is perceived as robbing valuable funding, for example, from libraries, recreation centers or fire departments. Such an assumption forces criticism and scrutiny on public access funding that Educational and Government access don't have. PEG access often appears as a threat to the local community, particularly Public access—the most likely to engage in a form of "FCFS." In Public access all speech can be heard as long as it is protected by the First Amendment. Providing free speech need not be order-specific. Any number of operational scenarios make the management of video production on a strict FCFS basis difficult.

If one group of community organizations, for example, floods half of an operation with programs, is the access service still serving the entire public? Did all of the public have the same opportunity to produce an equal volume of shows for the channel? Is that service being delivered to the community in an equitable manner? How then does one allocate access to the channels in an equitable manner that also meets the needs of the general community? The examples below come from organizations throughout the country that face the FCFS dilemma head-on.

Special Insight

Take the case of a small public access operation with just one channel, less than a one million-dollar budget (no capital or facility support), and a public to serve of three million. Special interest groups discover this public access opportunity and promptly consume the resources to crank out vast numbers of programs.

Series renewal time arrives and "all-knowing" producers prepare to devour

limited space on the channel. The doors open at 9:00 a.m. and 50 producers fall through the doors. Even a lottery couldn't solve this one. Series must be allocated by theme or block scheduling which falls outside the parameters of FCFS. Access must deliver equitable services.

Scheduling Issues

Some centers want to showcase programming around holidays or specific themes like International Women's Day, or Black History Month. A producer might want to showcase some of her work and show a "block" of several programs. This is often a great way to reward producers for the long process of production or a videographer who gains local notoriety. As long as all producers have the opportunity for program showcasing, treatment is equitable.

Another case of special scheduling concerns the programming of those who might test First Amendment limits: violence, hate, sexually explicit material, etc. You know the story. Special time allocations to protect minors need to be in place.

Audience Identity

Producers, or users, aside, the public scrambles for some identification with their public access channel. They might want to know when they can see programs in their native language. Where are the programs for their children after school? They "never know when anything is on," or they want to complain to city council that "nothing on the public access channel is worth watching." A lack of concise information produces fragmented audiences. Viewers need program predictability and consistency. Thematic scheduling provides the public predictability and consistency while viewing the channel and provides equitable service delivery.

Forming Partnerships

In the recent "Audience" issue of the *CMR*, Barbara Popovic of CAN TV in Chicago, Illinois describes instances where community-based organizations form partnerships with access to build new audiences and new constituencies. This kind of relationship goes beyond the FCFS model. Partnerships bring groups of new audiences to the access channel.

If access centers must provide "everyone in the community" access to the channel, sometimes that means seeking out those who are not yet represented on the channel. Gaining viewers requires some initial assistance or collaboration with community groups and falls outside of the

parameters of FCFS, but consistent with equitable delivery of services.

Special Programs

Houston MediaSource provides an extensive apprenticeship program, funded by the Texas Commission on the Arts, that allows young videographers the opportunity to practice their video skills by teaching in local schools, assisting in ongoing programs that are short-staffed, or helping to develop new programs—such as an intern who is deaf teaching classes in captioning to hearing producers. Some interns now teach video classes in Spanish and Chinese.

When centers become "production services," often in search of needed funds, they should remain true to their access First Amendment mission. Staff can give assistance but not priority treatment. All equipment, for example, should come from the same pool that individual producers use. Although a new producer receives production assistance, the submission of a program should be consistent with general programming policy across the board.

Content Neutral Programming Management

The real issue in examining the equitable delivery of programming is that of content-neutrality and not that of program management: never abandon the concept of content-neutral programming. Having the right to air your show without prior restraint is not the same thing as having the absolute right to put your show on the channel when you want or in a particular order. The courts, in essence, have often said that it's not about what's easy, it's about what's right. The abandonment of FCFS services, even partially, can easily be viewed in conflict with the First Amendment. Any deviation should be carefully planned and monitored. The essence of one's public access operation must remain steadfast to the First Amendment. The day-to-day operation, in order for the service to remain relevant to community needs, may dictate that many services are not well served by strict FCFS management.

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This article will be presented in a White Paper session at the 2002 national conference of the Alliance for Community Media in Houston, Texas.

REVITALIZING ACCESS PHILOSOPHY

White Paper Sessions Schedule, 2002 Alliance national conference. Several presentations build on articles in this issue of the *Community Media Review*. These sessions explore and challenge long-held beliefs in access.

THURSDAY MORNING, JULY 11

White Paper Session #1: White Paper Presentation—This White Paper session addresses philosophical or self-reflexive aspect of access as we look to the future. Ideas are presented and then open for discussion by session participants.

"First Come, First Served: Last One Standing"—Dirk Koning, Community Media Center, Grand Rapids, Michigan

THURSDAY AFTERNOON, JULY 11

White Paper Session #2: "Philosophical Issues, Policy Implications"—This session continues discussion from the first White Paper session, exploring basic tenets of access philosophy.

"First Come, First Served: An Outmoded Management Strategy?"—Pat Garlinghouse, Houston MediaSource and Paul Congo, Access Monterey Peninsula (California)

"Threats to Public Access"—Dee Dee Halleck, University of California at San Diego

FRIDAY MORNING, JULY 12

White Paper Session #3: "Building Collaborations: Academia And Access" This White Paper session discusses recent scholarly research related to access, and explores collaborations between access and academia.

"Integrating Teaching and Educational Cable"—Robert Huesca, Trinity University, San Antonio Texas

"Virtual Public Access: Has the Internet Eliminated the Need for Public Access Television?"—Laura R. Linder, University of North Carolina at Greensboro

"Community and Localism in American Thought and Media Policy"—Bill Kirkpatrick, University of Wisconsin at Madison

"Conflict: the First Amendment, Individual Rights, and Public Access"—John W. Higgins, Menlo College, Atherton California

Communication Bridges

Civic Communication Requires Encouragement and Support

BY ELLIOT MARGOLIES

Every year, fewer Americans put time into any civic, voluntary activity, let alone the extra demands and challenges inherent in public communication.¹ Public communication is done on an intimidating stage where the communicator is evaluated by others. It usually requires that a communicator carve out precious time to prepare his or her letter to the editor, art piece, or statement before city council; and at most public access TV studios, it also requires recruiting and motivating a team of volunteer crew to help produce a program. It's no wonder that we tend to see the same faces on civic stages. Civic communication requires encouragement and support in our privatized milieu.

Community Media Centers: Future Ghost Towns?

Community Media Centers could become ghost towns or Wayne's World Havens, if they serve only the groups who are "ready to go" with enough people-power and time to undergo video training and produce a program series. The "If-you-build-it, they-will-come" philosophy might work well for a multiplex theatre, but a community media center must go way beyond hanging out a shingle to cultivate and nourish a vibrant and representative electronic town square. The shrewd community media center will regularly redesign and tweak its policies, activities, job roles, and services to insure diverse participation. We must be like bold, experimental chefs in order to develop a community resource for communications that goes beyond mere recreation. In the '70s, the "first come, first served" philosophy reflected our optimism and our commitment to the First Amendment. But in the world we live in, that credo is often at odds with the goal of community building and creating a venue that reflects local diversity and civic participation.

At our media center in Palo Alto, California, we are proud of the plentitude of programs produced in our studio each year, but simultaneously frustrated by the hurdles that inhibit high production value for those who do participate and that keep many from participating at all. The challenge of producing a studio TV series—getting guests, some amount of scripting and set designing, recruiting a crew, getting production training, and publicizing the show is a very tall order. For every group that becomes an ongoing community TV producer, there are dozens who will never try, and others who consistently fail. Over the years, for example, we have seen three different Polynesian groups try to create a series—only to stumble over the logistical challenges including time, crew, and transportation. Consequently the Tongan and Samoan community has rarely been reflected on our channels.

Alternative Vehicles for 'Bringing People to Voice'

Over the years we have implemented a number of "fixes" to make the process more accessible and manageable for would-be communicators. We've also tried to develop alternative vehicles for bringing people to voice including staff productions and a community forum on the internet using a conferencing software. We have not discovered any "magic pills"—new services or job

descriptions that immediately result in an outpouring of community communications—but we know we have brought many people to the community stage that would not otherwise have made it. Ideally, we would institutionalize all the "fixes" into our ongoing services, but in our situation, limited resources dictate that we juggle such measures in and out. Here is a list, variations of which will be familiar to many other centers:

Supporting Producers

- ▲ Establish a paid or unpaid in-house studio crew to enable many different community groups to utilize the "turnkey" studio.
- ▲ Assign a staff-person as "production coordinator" to help a new producing group get on its feet for a period of time. Coordinator actually recruits crew, develops a set, and helps with publicity.

- ▲ Organize a coalition of like-minded community groups to produce a series together.

- ▲ Establish an "auto pilot studio" enabling producers to speak out using a simple technical setup—no crew required.

- ▲ "Dr. Studio"—a staff person who is available to producers for meetings regarding production value or for helping locate new crew members.

- ▲ Classes for producers for "spicing up" talk shows.

Staff Productions

- ▲ Initiate staff-produced series that create a venue for community groups who wish to use—but not produce TV.

- ▲ Initiate community forums when issues erupt. Set up candidate forums before every election. (We do this in partnership with a local newspaper.)

- ▲ Assign staff videographers to cover community issues forums and events.

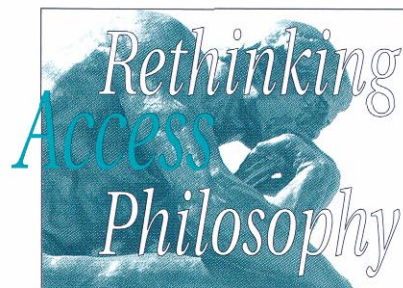
Why We Do It

Many access centers would not touch staff productions with a 10-foot pole. There's the concern that valuable access dollars and resources would be diverted to staff pursuits. Also, it may seem presumptuous for the staff to assume it knows what programming the community needs, not to mention the fact that a staff production filters community expression through its choice of hosts and guests. We share those concerns at the Media Center, but we balance them against other concerns.

- ▲ We want to bring many different groups and individuals to voice.

- ▲ We want the channels to be a relevant citizen resource as issues erupt.

- ▲ We see a studio that is used in large part by the same producers for years at a time, while scores of other community



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groups do not participate.

The programs we produce are designed to feature diverse community voices and generate a community-focused, public forum. For example, we do not produce music videos, or even documentaries where points of view are too limited and production dollars are too many. We take measures to mitigate the impact of staff production on resources available to public access producers.

Staff produced series include:

- ▲ An arts program that highlights a different artist or arts group each time
- ▲ A local issues program featuring people recently in the news
- ▲ A local news show where all the reporters are from local organizations, clubs, neighborhood associations, etc.
- ▲ Local sports.

Election forums

The news show alone, in its inaugural year, has brought in 20 new organizations that had not produced programs before. These groups produce stories on a rotating basis while Media Center staff tapes and edits the pieces. With the grassroots news program, we have created an avenue for public communication enabling us to serve many more community groups and simultaneously catalyze our civic sector.

Rebuilding the Town Square

I have shared the access-staff person instinct to box the ears of those who dial us up requesting TV coverage of one thing or another—as though we are an army of videographers just waiting to serve groups who have no desire to videotape anything themselves. I have moaned and groaned at the prospect of adding more outreach, production support, new media services, and staff programming to counteract the communications inertia of a waning American civic sector. Why should under-funded, overextended community media centers take on so many extra challenges when we are already straining our Popeye-esque “muscles” to accomplish our core activities well?

Because there's not much choice. Because the treadmill culture we are part of is mass producing apathy and disengagement from community life, and it's our job—in partnership with everybody we can enlist—to confront that. In an ideal world, media center staff would attend to each group in the order that they have lined up around the block. In our world, people are dispersed and consumed by shopping, long hours at work, brain-numbing commutes, and hours of seductive entertainment in front of one screen or another. Our challenge is to rebuild a town square—lifting voices and transporting dialogue and dance from every sector of the community—as though the very life of our community were at stake!

Notes

¹ Several Harvard University studies confirm that volunteerism and civic activity—across the board—have been on an alarming decline since 1965. See *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* by Robert D. Putnam (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000)

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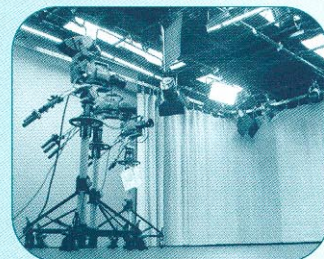
CTC President Ellison Horne, Mayor Willie L. Brown Jr, and Access San Francisco Executive Director Zane Blaney cut the ribbon for the new public access facility in San Francisco.

A New Day Dawns for Public Access in San Francisco

The April 27 grand opening of Access San Francisco heralds the first substantial upgrade of public access television in the city in over 20 years. The Honorable Mayor Willie Brown Jr. was present to cut the ribbon, officially opening the doors of Access San Francisco to the hundreds of producers, volunteers, programmers, and community organizations who use the facility on a regular basis. The new 4400 square foot public access media center includes multiple studios including a flash studio, linear digital edit suites, TiltRac automated playback system, and Sony PD-150 field packages.

The grand opening is the culmination of a three-year effort to bring a new beginning to community-based media in San Francisco, including a successful transition of cable operator management to non-profit management by the San Francisco Community Television Corporation (CTC).

Access San Francisco Executive Director Zane Blaney reflects, “Now that this build-out has been completed, San Francisco takes its place among cities with state-of-the-art access facilities. We look forward to facing the challenges of raising needed and sustainable funding, promoting community dialog among the people of San Francisco, helping underrepresented and diverse voices empower themselves, and developing partnerships with media arts associations, media literacy groups, and other community-based organizations.”



Re-thinking 'Access'

Cultural Barriers to Public Access Television

"In stratified societies, unequally empowered social groups tend to develop unequally valued cultural styles. The result is the development of powerful informal pressures that marginalize the contributions of members of subordinated groups both in everyday contexts and in official public spheres."

— Nancy Fraser¹

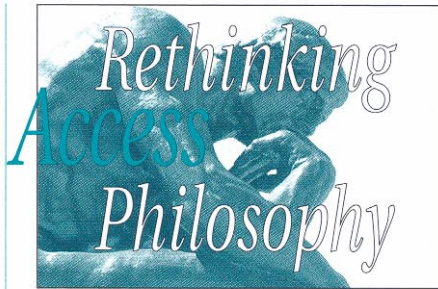
BY BILL KIRKPATRICK

Introduction

In this article I would like to address what I see as a disconnect between the principles of public access and the philosophy of public access. On the one hand is the founding principle of free speech—democracy of the airwaves, everybody's channel, your voice can be heard, etc. On the other, there is a dominant philosophy of civic participation in the marketplace of ideas that values a particular kind of political speech and certain notions of quality over others—with the result that "bad" or "fringe" or "vanity" programming is devalued and denigrated. Thus you can read George Stoney, in the summer 2001 issue of *Community Media Review*, who talks about "irresponsible" users with their "thoughtless self-indulgence . . . wasting everybody's time" (29) or you might have read the description of the panel on controversial programming at the 2001 conference in Washington, D.C., describing certain producers who are a "menace to access" and must be "defeated." It is not quite, it seems, everybody's channel after all. Instead, we find a gap where the principle of open access doesn't quite meet the philosophy of civic participation.

There are several possible ways of bridging this gap. Stoney's solution is to ease away from first principles, tolerating self-indulgence while applying persuasion and pressure on producers to conform to certain kinds of speech. Today, I will take the other approach and argue that we instead need to ease away from privileging certain forms of political speech, not in order to say that anything

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goes, but in order to understand the politics inherent even in apparently "trivial" programming. In other words, before we back away from open access, let's look at why so-called "bad" programming is considered bad, and whether there isn't in fact a lot more good in such programming than we realize.

The Case of *Metromen*

I started thinking about this issue a few years ago when I was cablecasting at my local public access station in Madison, Wisconsin, WYOU. During my shift, we had a program called *Metromen* that consisted of a group of highschoolers basically sitting around talking to their friends who called in, interspersed with segments in which they pretended to wrestle in the style of their WWE heroes. Now, there is probably a show like this (or close enough) on just about every access station around the country: unprofessional, undisciplined, and politically unfocused.

However, what I found most interesting about this show was not the content per se, but the role it came to play in the politics of the station. On the one hand, there were

complaints from the public about the occasional swear word or off-color reference that popped up, and the show was used by then-provider TCI and certain municipal leaders to try to strangle public access in Madison. But there were also pressures coming from the producer and staff at WYOU to make the show more "serious," more "issue-oriented," more like the original political vision of public access. The teens could dabble in wrestling and have their fun, but there should be some "real content" to the show—"teen issues" and the like. In short, they officially tolerated the teens' self-indulgence while pressuring them to conform to more civic forms of speech: essentially Stoney's preferred solution.

Making *Metromen* "Responsible"

In some ways, these pressures to make the show more "responsible" may have been in the best interests of the station, toning down controversy during a period of franchise renegotiation. But at the same time, this episode sheds light on some of the values and ideals that continue to underlie the philosophy of access—values and ideas about culture, democracy, speech, and society that work to either privilege or suppress certain kinds of speech, modes of expression, ideas, and speakers. Through myriad subtle and not-so-subtle ways, both visible and invisible—the raised eyebrow, the disparaging comment, the selective lack of enthusiasm for a given production—we who are involved in public access are also gatekeepers, part of the forces that limit or enable the principle of open access. As Fraser noted in the epigram of this article, there are powerful informal pressures that help close off access to the media, and we must recognize our participation in that process.

Therefore, while public access practi-

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tioners have done an outstanding job of reducing technological and financial barriers to accessing the public sphere of politics, there remain cultural barriers to media participation that we need to better address. So first I will talk a little bit about traditional notions of the public sphere, and some of the cultural barriers that these notions fortify. Then I will discuss another way of looking at the public sphere and consider how this second model might help address some of these cultural barriers, adjusting the fit between our principles and our philosophies.

Access and the Public Sphere

So let's start with the public sphere. Central to theories of democracy is the idea that there must be a way for citizens to come together to discuss issues of common concern so that public opinion can be formed and democratic decisions can be made. The "place" where this happens is the public sphere. Perhaps the most influential ideas about the public sphere were formed by a German philosopher named Juergen Habermas.² Habermas argued that the ideal public sphere would be one in which social status could be separated from public debate: we should, in effect, pretend to all have the same status and social power so that we can debate as equals. The way that this would work in practice is that public debate would be "rational-critical" debate—logical, unemotional, reasoned, deliberate, and politically focused.

While Habermas himself may or may not be a familiar figure, there is a version of such ideas that is more common. This is the metaphor of the "marketplace of ideas" that is so central to First Amendment theory. The idea here is that we have free speech in a democracy—a free market of ideas—and that the best idea will ultimately be the one that wins out. Through rational dialogue, we as a society can form public opinion about how to govern ourselves. In this philosophy, power is seen to reside in the ideas themselves, not in the speaker, the speaker's status, or the mode of communication: good ideas will drown out bad ideas.

The Public Sphere and the Marketplace of Ideas

The marketplace of ideas metaphor of the public sphere has been very influential in the history of public access, and almost every key work refers to it in some form or another.³ In fact, it is hard to even

imagine having public access without thinking in these terms, because what public access offers first and foremost is access to this supposed marketplace of ideas: historically it has been about creating a public sphere to which all citizens have access, bringing about that Habermasian ideal in which not just the rich and powerful can go on television, but even ordinary citizens can have their voice heard, so that the best ideas win out.

It is clear that this metaphor has gotten us a very long way, and I have nothing but respect for those who pioneered and continue to struggle on behalf of this ideal. But I also hope to point out where the limits are—how this philosophy of access can get us only so far. If public access is about access to the marketplace of ideas, then the barriers that it must confront are primarily financial and technological. Specifically, to gain access to the airwaves, you have to have the financial means and the technical know-how to get your message out. That's why public access is free (or virtually free) to its users; that's why there's such a strong emphasis on equipment and technical training; that's why outreach is so important to bring in representatives of various groups: We're building a public sphere to which social status is no barrier. It doesn't matter how rich you are or how well educated or what language you speak; public access will guarantee you entry into that ideal public sphere. And thanks to this vision, public access has had enormous successes over the past 30 years.

Valuing Rational-Critical Speech Forms Over Others

It follows from this that, because we are trying to bring about a particular ideal public sphere, certain kinds of speech are valued over others. Specifically, we tend to value the civic, rational-critical modes of speech—the public affairs shows, town meetings, "arts and culture," etc.—over more populist speech, rude speech, vanity programming, etc. So in the example of *Metromen*, there was pressure to spend less time wrestling (which is not considered civic speech) and more time discussing so-called teen issues, ideally in a kind of rational-critical form of discourse that rarely overlaps with the teens' own preferred way of speaking. In other words, the producers of this public access show were asked to enter the public sphere not

on their own terms, but on the more restrictive terms of the ideal rational-critical public sphere. Another example comes from the Alliance discussion list a while ago: The thread was about call-in shows, and one participant emphasized the need to screen the callers so

that, for instance, you don't have someone screaming obscenities at the mayor. In other words, it is perfectly acceptable to discuss denying access to those who do not conform to what we deem "acceptable" or "quality" speech.

These are not isolated examples. In fact, if you read the critics of television such as Robert Putnam, you will frequently find hierarchies of quality established in which shows like *Nightline* that emphasize rational-critical debate are deemed relatively good, while shows like *Jerry Springer* are deemed "trash": not worth watching, possibly even pathological. Such hierarchies are also active in public access, despite the principle of openness and tolerance. In a 1999 article in the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media*, Donna King and Christopher Mele argued much the same thing, taking to task prominent writers on access for valorizing "legitimate" public discourse while treating so-called "vanity" or "fringe" programming as an embarrassing waste of time. To the extent that such hierarchies are—perhaps "enforced" is too strong a word—communicated by those in power at an access studio, they serve to discourage or limit certain speakers and forms of speech from being broadcast.

Now, given enough support and cooperation from the community, the municipal government, and the cable company, we can begin to solve the financial and technological barriers to access. But these cultural barriers are much more subtle and difficult to solve. They involve rethinking not just what the access project

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is, not just our definitions of “quality,” but even how democracy itself might work in ways that don’t depend on the idealized public sphere or the marketplace of ideas.

Hurdling Cultural Barriers to Access

To repeat: according to the dominant philosophy of access, we should be trying above all to bring about a public sphere in which we pretend that differences do not exist, in which we engage in rational-critical debate, and that we aim for some sort of consensus of public opinion through the marketplace of ideas. We prefer “serious” and “quality” programming on our stations, and at best merely tolerate programs that don’t conform to our definitions of those virtues. I would argue, however, that a rational mode of politics is not the only way society works. Public opinion is not expressed only through the official realm of politics and civic speech, and social relations are not negotiated only through public policy. I would suggest that opinions about society are just as valid when expressed through marginalized forms of speech, perhaps even more so, but—and this is key—we need to learn to read this speech for what it is, for its political content. Furthermore, resistance to the existing social order, which is an important contribution to the public sphere, often takes forms of speech that are themselves opposed to that order. In such cases, rational-political debate, civic speech, propriety, and obvious relevance (obvious to the mainstream and relevant to the mainstream, that is) give way to oppositional and resistant forms of speech. And those forms are just as valid as any other. Instead of further marginalizing them, we must try to see them as resistant politics in a resistant package.

An analogy might be helpful here. When *Public Enemy* raps about racial tension and conditions in the inner cities, a large segment of mainstream society will reject it as atonal garbage, as so much irritating noise: profane, obscene, devoid of musicality, etc. While I disagree with such characterizations, the important thing is that the same message

of oppression and unrest, wrapped up in a polite documentary, with the bad words bleeped out and the conventions of documentary dutifully followed, is much more likely to win our approval as honest, hard-hitting political speech. Why? Because it is a form of speech that we understand, that we are comfortable with, that submits to the mode of politics that we like—and if that form doesn’t speak to the producers or their intended audience, then the problem must lie with them, not us. It is, according to this all-too-prevalent view, not our fault for misunderstanding the political speech in a rap song, but their fault for not encoding that political speech in the form we desire. In point of fact, *Public Enemy*’s music contributed significantly to the public sphere in articulating opposition to racial oppression, in helping the dispossessed make sense of their lives, and in resisting the social relations that contribute to the unspeakable conditions of the inner city. The barriers of understanding that lead many to miss this fact are purely cultural.

Political Potential in All Forms of Speech

To return to Public access, to call something “fringe” or “vanity” programming is to dismiss the speaker because we don’t understand the speech—whether or not we are even being spoken to. Instead of valorizing rational-critical debate, the realm of “official” politics, the public affairs shows, the “arts and culture” shows, and the earnest documentaries, we need to understand and appreciate the political potential in all forms of speech. So in the example of *Metromen*, we have a show that isn’t devoid of politics, and it doesn’t need to be “corrected” by injecting “teen issues.” It is, in fact, all about teen issues: issues of identity as they try on different personas; issues of inclusion and exclusion as they negotiate friendships and social networks through the medium; obvious issues of sexuality and masculinity; and issues of resistance to adult authority and control as they use their language, pursue their interests, and mobilize their cultural artifacts like

wrestling and rap music to challenge their subordinated social position. To call them irresponsible and self-indulgent means that we want them to resist power using

power’s tools instead of their own.

By recognizing their contribution to the public sphere, however, we can begin to close the gap between our principles and our philosophy. If we question the taste hierarchies born of our commitment to the civic definition of politics, then we can begin to confront the cultural barriers that impinge on the principle of open access.

Cultural Barriers Create an Access Disconnect

Public access is valuable because it fosters democratic participation, yes, but it is also valuable precisely because it is divisive, disruptive, and transgressive—and even because it is trivial, banal, and inane. As a forum for those lacking in the social and economic power to use other media, public access needs to be defended especially for speech that strikes the mainstream as ridiculous or dangerous.

We need to review our role in further marginalizing such speech even in the supposedly open forum of access. How do we treat such producers? How do we schedule them? How do we show them that their contribution is (or is not) valued? And how can we overcome our own tastes and prejudices about what constitutes appropriate speech in order to foster a more supportive climate for these producers?

My argument is that cultural barriers help create an unfortunate disconnect between access principles and philosophies, but that there are things we can do and adjustments we can make to help bridge this gap. These means rethinking how the public sphere operates, using a more generous understanding of political speech and the different cultural forms it can take. It means helping producers realize their vision, not ours.

Notes

¹ Fraser, 120.

² See for instance *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. While Habermas revised his ideas about the public sphere over the years, this 1962 book remains one of the seminal works in public sphere theory. It should be noted that this book was not translated into English until 1989, and thus was not a direct influence on early public access advocates per se. However, many of Habermas’ ideas about democracy and the media were part of a larger school of leftist thought that was

If we question the taste hierarchies born of our commitment to the civic definition of politics, then we can begin to confront the cultural barriers that impinge on the principle of open access.

influential in the 1960s and 1970s, most notably through the work of Marcuse, Adorno, Horkheimer, and Enzensberger, and it was Habermas who applied these ideas to the concept of the public sphere.

³ The marketplace of ideas metaphor is highly flexible, and has been invoked on both the left and the right with varied emphasis depending on the ideological position of the speaker. Thus, those on the right tend to erase the question of power in order to use the metaphor to sustain a market-populist ideology, while those on the left make issues of power and status more central in order to highlight disparities in access to the means of communication.

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This article was presented in the White Paper session at the 2001 national conference of the Alliance for Community Media in Washington, D.C. It was selected through competitive submission of essays during the Spring of 2001; authors were asked to address a philosophical or self reflexive aspect of access.

Quotes to Ponder

"Anyone who expects to be emancipated by technological hardware, or by a system of hardware however structured, is the victim of an obscure belief in progress. Anyone who imagines that freedom for the media will be established if only everyone is busy transmitting and receiving is the dupe of a liberalism which, decked out in contemporary colors, merely peddles the faded concepts of a preordained harmony of social interests."

— Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 1970.

"Constituents of a Theory of the Media." *Dreamers of the Absolute: Essays on Politics, Crime and Culture*. Trans. Stuart Hood. London: Century Hutchinson, 1988. 20-53.

"We should thus be deeply skeptical about any claims that access is inherently democratizing. Such claims are made through the narcotic haze of technological utopianism that was widespread at the time when access first appeared in cable franchises."

— Andrew Blau, 1992.

"The Promise of Public Access." *The Independent* 15.3 (April): 22-26.

"Communications technology does not automatically solve problems. The use of media for animation purposes is process rather than task oriented. The process of a community forming associations, formulating and articulating concerns, forging public discourse, achieving consensus and restructuring power relationships is probably more significant than the programs themselves, and certainly more significant than the technology used to accomplish these processes."

— Bob Devine, 1992.

"Video, Access and Agency." Paper Presented at the Annual Conference of the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers. St. Paul, Minnesota. July 17.

"When we understand that communication is based on social relationships, we see that our work [in access] is not simply 'providing a communication opportunity' in some neutral way. As community media centers and media makers, our work is as much about furthering public discourse and social change as it is about making programs. To ignore that fact will only recreate the same old social patterns in a new glitzy electronic space. Taking a leadership role in media education provides us with 'the real work' to do in our communities, and it can provide us with the conceptual tools and the self awareness needed to do the job."

— Fred Johnson, 1994.

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Integrating Teaching and Educational Cable to Enrich The Community, Campus & Students

BY ROBERT HUESCA

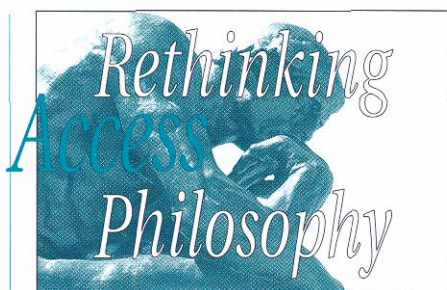
The educational cable channel in San Antonio, Texas provides schools with a valuable, though grossly under-utilized, resource for showcasing student talent, contributing to the academic curriculum, and enriching the local community. Though guilty of neglecting this precious resource, I recently had the opportunity to place the educational cable channel at the heart of a final assignment in a course on alternative media at Trinity University where I teach. This had beneficial effects for the students, the institution, and the local community. This article will briefly describe a class-produced documentary that aired on the local educational cable channel, the course itself and how academic curricula might be used more systematically to enrich educational cable offerings.

When I Dream Dreams

When I Dream Dreams is a 20-minute documentary examining the social, psychological, and linguistic consequences of a Texas law that criminalized the use of any language other than English in the public schools from 1918 to 1968. The documentary, which aired on the educational cable channel in March of this year, is based on interviews with local, Mexican-American teachers, students, and lawmakers who worked and studied in the public schools at the time the law was in force.

The title of the documentary is drawn from a poem of the same name that describes the thoughts, dreams, and experiences of a student at Rhodes Middle School, which is located in a predominantly Mexican American neighborhood where Spanish is spoken by many residents. The poem's author, Carmen Tafolla, recited the lines, which served as a narrative device that opened, closed, and appeared intermittently in the documentary. Woven between the poem's verses, interviewees describe their experiences:

▲ "I spent a lot of time in the clothes closet for speaking Spanish. I remember



In the future when I teach this course, I will probably design the assignment so that students are required to connect formally with local producers, who are typically very welcoming of partnerships with area college students.

one time the kids went to lunch and the teacher forgot that I was in there. So I went and got my lunch and proceeded to eat it in the clothes closet," former student Ernesto Bernal.

▲ "I have a paddle with holes drilled through it, and it says, 'Board of Education,' and it's got kids' signatures and little strokes next to the signatures. The rule at the school was one stroke—a stroke was a hit with the paddle—a stroke for every word of Spanish," former student Carmen Tafolla.

▲ "Every Monday the school would issue you a ribbon, and on that ribbon it said, 'I speak English, I'm a good American.' And our students that were on the student council would walk the halls, and if I heard you speaking Spanish, I would take your name, take your ribbon away from you, and turn that ribbon over to your homeroom teacher, and you would get a demerit. That was the system," former state representative and senator Joe Bernal.

The sequencing of the documentary first establishes the context of the schools for non-English speakers, then explores the social, psychological, and linguistic consequences, and finally describes the means of overcoming the policy's damaging effects. The emotionally charged interviews variously elicit sadness, sympathy, anger, and hope, and they func-

tion as a document of historic importance in San Antonio where bilingual education continues to be debated.

School Curricula and Educational Cable Channels

This rich and evocative documentary stands as testimony of what can happen when school curricula are integrated with the philosophy and mission of educational cable channels. This documentary was the product of a university course examining alternative media, where students spent the first ten weeks studying theories and philosophies such as democracy and communication, community media, and feminism. During this time they also examined alternative media exemplars such as fanzines, pirate radio, and public access and educational cable television. In the final six weeks of the course, teams were asked to produce an alternative media video that was guided by some of the theoretical and philosophical contributions covered in the first part of the class.

Among the assignment's requirements was a distribution plan for the final video, and one group, the *Dreams* video, identified a community screening via the educational cable channel, among other options. One way of enriching the public access and educational cable channels further might have been to assign students to identify community producers who might have acted as collaborators in enhancing the final projects' distribution. Most cities have a core of local producers who are connected to institutions and issues and who have developed loyal viewers. In the future when I teach this course, I will probably design the assignment so that students are required to connect formally with local producers, who are typically very welcoming of partnerships with area college students.

The Role of the Documentary in Community Life

Although the March cablecast generated little public feedback, the student producers have a larger conceptual frame of reference for thinking about the role of



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— Carmen Tafolla

the documentary in community life. The student producers identified their work as an alternative video largely because of its content, which focused on a topic virtually ignored by mainstream media, challenged conventional views regarding public schools, and drew on voices that are excluded from public discourse. Furthermore, the producers enlisted the interviewees to play the role of storytellers, rather than to answer a list of factual questions in the style of mainstream journalism, and included lengthy segments that stood on their own, without the professional scripting of the omniscient narrator. In this way the students felt that some video agency was being relinquished by them and conferred upon the participants. One student wrote in her reflexive analysis, "Our video also very much interrupted traditional power codes—it enabled individuals whose values have been marginalized the opportunity to reclaim and reconstruct the portrait of their culture."

Student Producer Growth and Transformation

Finally, the producers of this video described a feeling of individual growth and transformation while working on a video that attempted to appeal to a broad community audience, while breaking away from mainstream documentary conventions. This self transformation came from enlisting interviewees to func-

tion as collaborating storytellers, which led to an expansion of the producers' consciousness that might not have occurred had they followed a more traditional line of documentary production. The educational cable channel, therefore, needs to be valued not only for its output, but also for its impact on production practices leading up to distribution and exhibition.

The educational cable channel in San Antonio has evolved into primarily a carrier of bulletin board announcements and canned programming of classroom activities and routine student produc-

tions, such as news and talk shows. This recent experience with a documentary of historic local importance demonstrated one way of enhancing the value of this resource by integrating it with a course that provided a thoughtful and challenging impetus to student producers. In the end, the documentary not only benefited the educational cable audience, but it enhanced the learning of the students who were trying to reach the public using some unconventional techniques and strategies.

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This article will be presented in a White Paper session at the 2002 national conference of the Alliance for Community Media in Houston, Texas.

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Where in the World is U.S. PEG?

“...a wider context to all our actions, our geography and our very lives.”

BY DEEDEE HALLECK

As September 11 so forcefully pointed out, we in the US have to realize that there is a wider context to all our actions, our geography and our very lives. I recall years ago Elliot Margolies, then director of Cupertino Cable, in a PSA for Deep Dish recounted a conversation he had with his son. “Dad, why do we have wars?” was the question. “Son, because we don’t have enough public access.” was his answer. Now more than ever, community communication is necessary—crucial. But the wider context is essential.

There are several ways in which the PEG community in the US has been part of a global context. First, of course, is as a model for community dialogue. The creation of the infrastructure for democratic communication has been something many groups all over the world are seeing as an important example of using technology to enhance civic participation. Movements have sprung up in Germany, Korea, Brazil and many other countries which have been initiated and encouraged by the work of access in this country.

Second, the US access movement has successfully “taxed” multinational corporations in a way that provides for public “pay back”. This has been seen and is being studied globally as a unique and useful application of contractual law. This has implications not only for television and internet, but for other aspects of business: by requiring responsibility for local benefit from large multi-national corporations.

Third, the PEG movement has provided the world with ambassadors of communication—those leaders, such as Dirk Koning, Jessica Ross, George Stoney and others who have traveled the world to assist local efforts by sharing their vast experience and concrete knowledge.

Fourth, and this is where I think the PEG community must take more leadership, has been the use of local community media for discussion of global issues.

Encouraging Global Understanding

How can local channels help to sustain global understanding? Obviously one way is for community media centers to provide space and infrastructure for immigrant populations to express their concerns and culture. I recall during the Gulf War visiting the Minneapolis center and seeing two editors working on a program which was basically Saddam Hussein’s speeches. It was a local Iraqi group making their weekly show. I recall thinking that what they really needed was to translate the program so that other people in the Twin Cities could at least hear what “the enemy” was saying. Could the process of doing that translation have been initiated by the access center? Could the Iraqi producers have been encouraged to participate in a round table discussion? Could there be community forums (face to face, not necessarily only on the tube)? Of course PEG administrators are over-worked and under-budgeted and not looking for extra work. However, if PEG is to thrive in this difficult climate, we must encourage programming that takes ourselves and the world seriously. Certainly the local network news is not going to provide

this sort of forum. Unless community media becomes more proactive, we will soon be as irrelevant as the mass media portrays us.

Another possibility is program exchange with media makers from other countries, by helping local organizations connect with international sources of media. One example is *Korean Labor News*. As many factories move out of the country, it is becoming more and more important for workers around the world to share their concerns. Myoung Joon Kim has been a frequent visitor to this country and works with video makers who document labor struggles in his country.

Many of these programs are translated and could be quite useful for local rank and file workers to see and discuss. Other areas for exchange are the environmental and animal rights movements. There are many local groups who would probably value having international programming on these issues. By providing the resources to facilitate this sort of program exchange, PEG can improve the channel’s quality and increase local support.

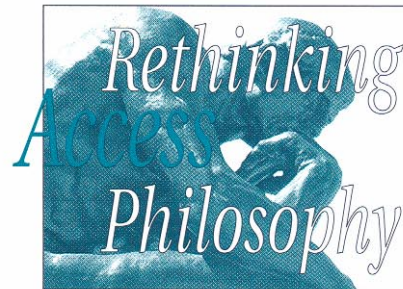
Indy Media Center Movement

An example of community media that has been able to successfully operate on a global scale in a uniquely horizontal and democratic way is the Independent Media Center movement (www.indymedia.org).

Begun in Seattle during the demonstrations around the World Trade Organization, this movement has sparked media activity in over 80 sites around the world, by providing a forum for reporting and posting of video, audio and photos. IMC’s could never have developed without global collaboration—the initial software (which provides for instant posting of many file formats) was developed in Australia and the elaborate foundation of servers and mirror server back-ups depends on infrastructure from many countries. An interesting resource for understanding just how the IMC’s work is their open discussion archive at <http://process.indymedia.org>. If there is an IMC in your community, find out how to connect with this dynamic group of media activists.

Upcoming Actions

As militarism flourishes around the world and the threat of nuclear war again rears its head, PEG centers must be places where we can resurrect peace and global understanding. This can only happen if we see ourselves as part of a larger community of



As militarism flourishes around the world and the threat of nuclear war again rears its head, PEG centers must be places where we can resurrect peace and global understanding. This can only happen if we see ourselves as part of a larger community of people around the world who are dedicated to dialogue and democratic exchange.

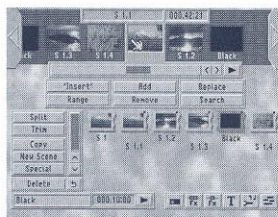
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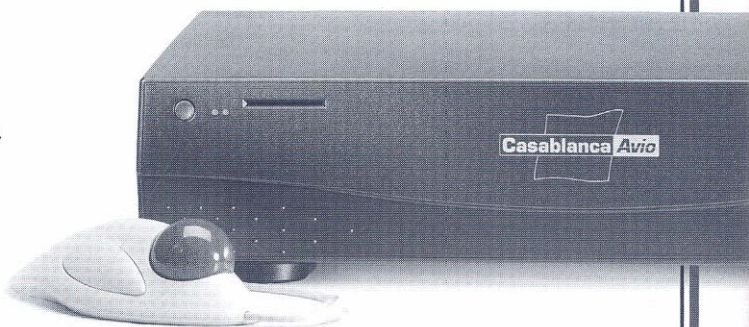
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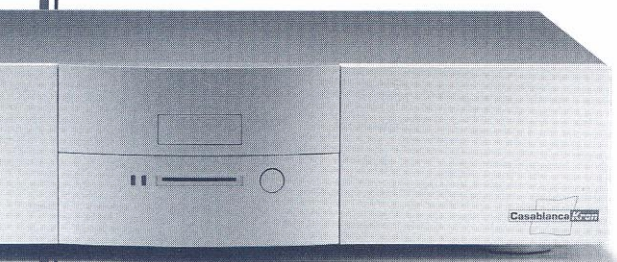
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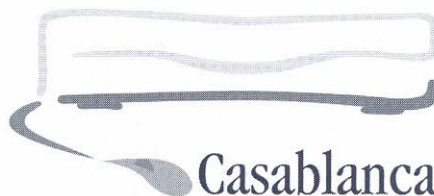
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A Guide to Philosophical Discussions of Community Media

BY JOHN W. HIGGINS

In the early 1990s I was a graduate student with an extensive background in commercial and community-based media, working on a dissertation about public access. Fred Johnson of Media Working Group put together a conference in Cincinnati, Ohio, that brought together two groups with interests in community media: scholars and practitioners. Between breaks, Dirk Koning from Grand Rapids pulled out a elaborately folded, origami-like piece of paper and asked me to choose "Pee Wee's Magic Word of the Day." ("Pee Wee's Magic Word" was a feature of a popular children's television program; when the secret word was mentioned throughout the show, all people and objects went wild.)

I chose a section of the folded paper; it lifted to reveal the word "hegemony." When I chose another, the word "pedagogy" was revealed; another showed "counter-hegemonic video." We laughed uproariously—the scholarly presentations had been rather stuffy and pretentious and, in some instances, unnecessarily obscure and jargon-laden. Nonetheless, the conference was successful in bringing together scholars and practitioners interested in promoting the ideals of grassroots, community-based, democratic media, and rooting the emergent theoretical perspectives on lived practice. The meeting was one event that helped cultivate "public intellectuals," or "organic intellectuals," or "philosopher practitioners"—people who engage the world through practice, reflect on the broader impact of such actions, with a theoretically and politically based consciousness about the implications of action and thought.

I think about that experience in Cincinnati at times. Access participation tends to cultivate public intellectuals from many different walks of life, involved in many different capacities within access: producers, staff, viewers, board members,

administrators. We need a space to gather and theoretically frame our access experiences, to place them in larger contexts—political, social, or philosophical, to name but a few. It doesn't take an advanced degree to participate in these discussions. But it can help to have a guide to the conversation.

Philosophical discussions related to access at times draw on shorthand terms in order to convey complex ideas in a

fully realize goals of equality and participatory democracy. They provide a more robust understanding of the nature of politics and power within society than the one-dimensional views portrayed on our nightly network newscasts.

The American mass media train us not to think too deeply about our lives, our beliefs, our relationship with the world. The corporate media promote anti-intellectualism and do little to encourage independent analytical or critical thought. Access participation shatters this model—encouraging a process of exploration of and engagement with ourselves, our communities, our world. We see that starting with the discovery of our own voice—or helping someone discover theirs—we can shape our world, we can make a difference.

Here is a brief guide to some of the concepts behind the discussions:

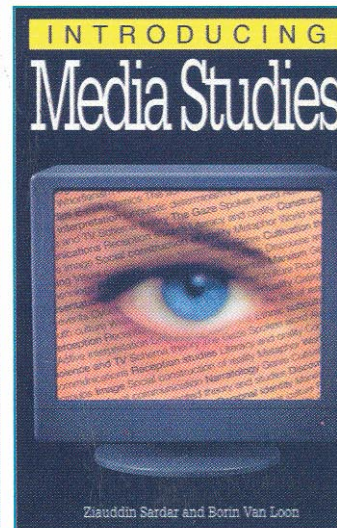
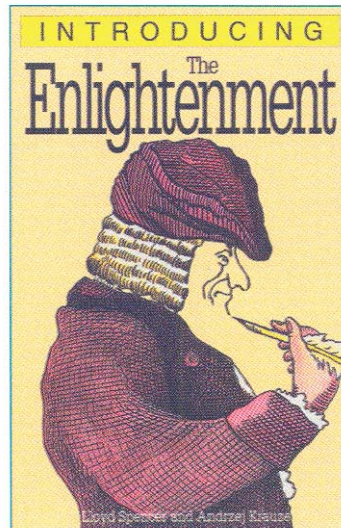
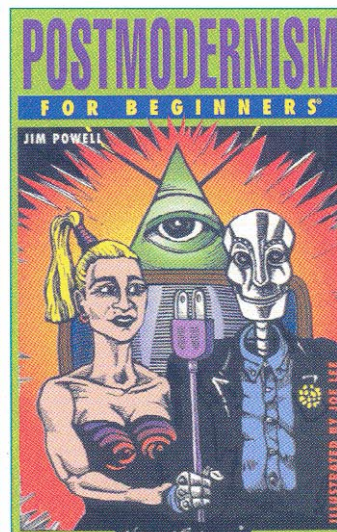
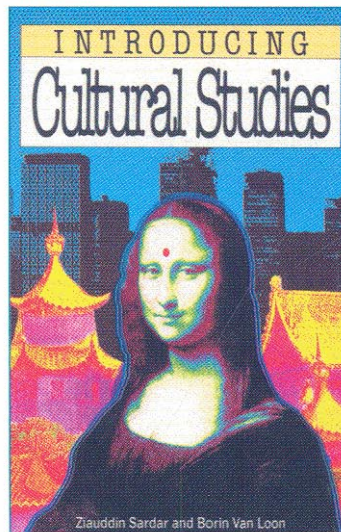
The Enlightenment

The 18th century European philosophical movement upon which the founding philosophies of the U.S. constitutional system were based. The Enlightenment—the "Age of Reason"—applied "scientific," rational thought to all areas of life: morality, politics, social, religion, philosophy, and science. The Enlightenment venerated the role of the independent, aloof, "objective" philosopher.

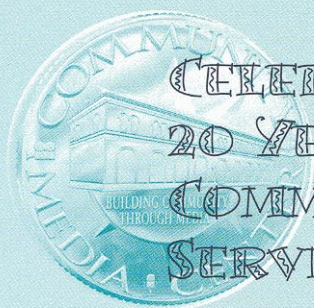
Liberal democratic, republican; pluralist thought

Generic terms referring to the Enlightenment-based principles underlying the U.S. constitutional system. Whether discussing "right" or "left" or "centrist" political stances, the big picture of U.S. political philosophy is a republican (representative) based system, encouraging grassroots participation with an equality of rights (democratic), inclusive of diverse groups and thought (pluralist) and liberal (progressive, reform-oriented—from the perspective of the era of the Enlightenment) in approach.

Ideas related to the "marketplace of



short period of time. Some of the more philosophically-based critiques of access and community media may seem a bit alien to the uninitiated; they are based on political and philosophical thought emerging primarily from the experiences of World Wars I and II. These schools of thought challenged many of the philosophical assumptions of the European and American democracies in order to more



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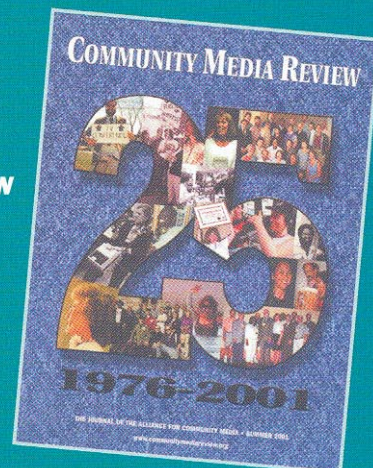
Who could have imagined twenty years ago, when GRTV broadcast its first live public access television program, that the channel would evolve into the Community Media Center—an array of media services for citizens and nonprofit organizations, offering television, radio, information democracy and media literacy, internet access, computer literacy, video production, and a media archives.

- 1980 Grand Rapids Cable Access Center, Inc. formed.
- 1981 Dirk Koning hired as executive director.
- 1982 First live broadcast on GRTV.
- 1983 GRTV opens in lower level of the Ryerson Library.
- 1984 Federal cable act allows additional funding.
- 1985 City of Grand Rapids signs 15-year franchise.
- 1986 Lillie Oliver joins GRCAC staff.
- 1987 Chuck Peterson joins GRCAC staff.
- 1989 GRCAC assumes ownership of community radio station WYCE, 88.1 FM.
- 1993 GRCAC adopts Community Media Center (CMC) as its dba.
- 1994 CMC awarded former Health Channel.
- 1994 CMC assumes ownership of Grand Rapids Freenet.
- 1996 CMC launches GrandNet, an ISP for nonprofits.
- 1997 CMC dedicates new facility in the Westside Library.
- 1997 Kellie Ashcroft joins CMC staff.
- 1998 CMC unveils GRIID, the Grand Rapids Institute for Information Democracy.
- 2001 City of Grand Rapids signs 15-year franchise with AT&T Cable that includes GRTV and LiveWire.
- 2002 CMC and GRTV launch MOLLIE, the MOBILE Learning Lab for Information Education.

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ideas,” “one person, one vote”—or “first come, first served”—stem from these roots.

Critical

Not the same as “analytical.” In this context, “critical” refers to an analysis that includes power (political) relationships, may be self-reflexive in approach, and seeks social change. The term also identifies a particular approach to scholarly study that includes and transcends subject areas such as communication, sociology, anthropology, politics, economics, etc. Critical theory disputes much of what it sees as naïve (unproblematic, under-theorized) assumptions of the Enlightenment, while supporting the goals of personal and societal transcendence.

For example, a critical approach might argue that the best way to achieve a “diversity of ideas” might not be from the Enlightenment-based “clash of ideas in the marketplace,” but from a more cooperatively-based model.

Critical thought emphasizes the role of the “organic intellectual”—the practitioner/philosopher who, guided by a political and philosophical awareness, is able to act within the world, reflect alone and with others on the effect of those actions, and re-direct action accordingly—to change the world.

Power

Notions of power are at the heart of critical thought and critiques of the Enlightenment. “Power” means issues of dominance and acquiescence, of which traditional politics (“liberal democratic”/“pluralist” discussions) are only a small part. An analysis of power within personal relationships, the media, or society, includes an exploration of which groups rule, which groups are subjugated, how the situation got to be this way, what ideals and practices hold the unequal power relationships in place, how the situation might be envisioned differently, and what actions might be taken to change the situation. These steps are applied from the micro to the macro levels, from personal to societal situations.

A critical analysis of “first come, first served,” for example, would argue that the policy perpetuates unequal power relationships in the society—since the people or groups most likely to first come through the door are those who already exercise some influence (power) in the community.

The policy of “first come, first served”

would be seen as politically naïve in that it attempts to restructure societal power relationships (giving unheard voices an opportunity to be heard), but actually ends up reinforcing the status quo.

Hegemony

A key concept in the notion of power. Formulated by Italian activist and philosopher Antonio Gramsci in the 1930s, the concept attempts to explain how power actually operates within society. Hegemony is the ability of the dominant group(s) to exercise social and cultural leadership over subordinated group(s) — AND to maintain power over the economic, political, and cultural direction of the larger society. This dominance is achieved through social and cultural means, not by direct coercion of subordinated groups.

An active, shifting set of group alliances, hegemony is said to work best when hidden. We consent to work with the dominant group, often against our own self and/or group interests. Hegemony identifies culture as a site of struggle between groups; in particular, the media reinforce ideologies that help the dominant group stay in power, since the media serve to maintain the status quo.

Of particular significance to access practitioner/philosophers is the notion of resistance to the hegemonic process: that there will always be resistance to the hegemonic process; opposition and alternatives can always be counted to spring up.

These alternatives will usually be “trashed” (“marginalized”) by mainstream thought, which is dominated by the hegemonic group.

Pedagogy

An expanded conceptualization of “teaching” and “learning” that recognizes both processes take place at the same time. Rather than being limited to just institutional schooling, pedagogy refers to the way we learn about the world, and how we teach others to perceive the world. Within the critical perspective, these processes are considered sites of intense power and ideological conflicts.

Resources

I was led to graduate studies by a fascinating comic book that raised intellectual questions within a fun format. So, I place a lot of stock in illustrated books—sort of like hefty comic books with thought-provoking content. For a fun exploration of some of the ideas presented above, try the illustrated/comic book series “*Introducing...*” or “*...For Beginners.*” Some of these include:

Introducing the Enlightenment, by Lloyd Spencer and Andrzej Krauze. Cambridge: Icon. 2000.

Introducing Media Studies, by Ziauddin Sardar and Borin Van Loon. New York: Totem. 2000.

Introducing Cultural Studies, by Ziauddin Sardar and Borin Van Loon. New York: Totem. 1998.

Postmodernism for Beginners, by Jim Powell. New York: Writers and Readers. 1998.

Where in the World...

continued from page 27

people around the world who are dedicated to dialogue and democratic exchange. In 2003 there will be a World Summit on the Information Society at the International Telecommunications Union (ITU) in Geneva. For the first time groups from civil society will take part. In the past it has only been business and governments. There is a growing movement to have democratic communication finally on the agenda of this international organization which, among other activities, assigns the global orbital slots for satellites. I hope that Alliance members will find out about this meeting (www.comunica.org) and become involved in this effort. At a recent meeting to prepare for this summit at UNESCO in Paris, I proposed that the ITU consider requiring all military satellites to have a proportion of their transponders dedicated to peace. It's about time. Of course that will take a long struggle. In the meanwhile we can begin at home, on our own channels.

DeeDee Halleck is a University of California San Diego professor emeritus, long time media activist, and author of the recent book, *Hand-Held Visions: The Impossible Possibilities of Community Media*. She can be reached by email at dhalleck@weber.ucsd.edu

This article will be presented in a White Paper session at the 2002 national conference of the Alliance for Community Media in Houston, Texas.



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Resources for the Access Practitioner/Philosopher

ORGANIZATIONS

Our Media, Not Theirs

A one day gathering of scholars and practitioners of alternative media from around the world to discuss practical and theoretical issues within "alternative," "radical," "community," "citizens" media. The focus is primarily on the Americas and Europe. The 2001 conference was in Washington, D.C.; the 2002 gathering is scheduled for July 20 in Barcelona. Information and papers from the conferences are available on the Our Media website:

faculty.menlo.edu/~jhiggins/ourmedia

Union for Democratic Communication

This organization brings together activists in academics and community-based media to explore issues within alternative media. Visit www.udc.org

BOOKS

The Daily Planet: A Critic on the Capitalist Culture Beat, by Patricia Aufderheide. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000.

This collection of essays by cultural critic and public intellectual Pat Aufderheide explores a range of issues related to the practice and culture of media in the U.S. and around the world. Topics include film, broadcasting, the Internet, media literacy, public policy, as well as access cable television's contribution to the public sphere. International concerns concentrate on cinema and grassroots video in Latin America.

Fissures in the Mediascape: An International Study of Citizens' Media, by Clemencia Rodriguez. Cresskill, NJ: Hampton, 2001.

Rodriguez presents four international case studies in grassroots electronic media, framing the discussion within the context of the democratization of communication and the survival of cultural identities. She explores numerous instances of "citizen's media" around the world, and focuses on instances in revolutionary Nicaragua in the 1980s; Catalonia, Spain; Colombia; and Latino radio in the U.S.

Rodriguez provides a context for understanding the manner in which "citizen's media" contribute to social change.

Hand-Held Visions: The Uses of Community Media, by DeeDee Halleck. New York: Fordham University Press, 2002.

Media activist and film/video maker DeeDee Halleck shares stories and thoughts from her three decades of experience with community-based media in the U.S. and around the world. The essays that make up this book are drawn from diary entries, articles, conference keynote addresses and presentations. Halleck thoughtfully combines people's stories, case studies, personal experiences, and theoretical frameworks to make the case for grassroots-oriented media and national/international policies that encourage community media. Topics touch on the origins of Paper Tiger TV, Deep Dish Network, and Gulf Crisis TV Project; public access cable television as an international model of community-based media; women and media; international examples of alternative media; and the Indy Media Center movement. The book includes a timeline of technology and alternative media—a helpful tool for anyone exploring the history of media industries and media activism in the U.S.

Jamming the Media: A Citizen's Guide: Reclaiming the Tools of Communication, by Gareth Branwyn. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1997.

Branwyn explains how to use public access television, the internet, film, radio, 'zines, and other media—from conception, through production, to distribution.

Radical

Media: Rebellious Communication and Social Movements, by John Downing, with Tamara Villareal Ford, Genève Gil, and Laura Stein. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2001.

Downing, et. al., present a theoretical framework in which to consider "radical," "alternative" media, including notions of audience, power, hegemony, community, and the public sphere. Organizational models of radical media are discussed. Various media in Europe and the U.S. are explored, including print, radio, video, the Internet, community radio, and public access television.

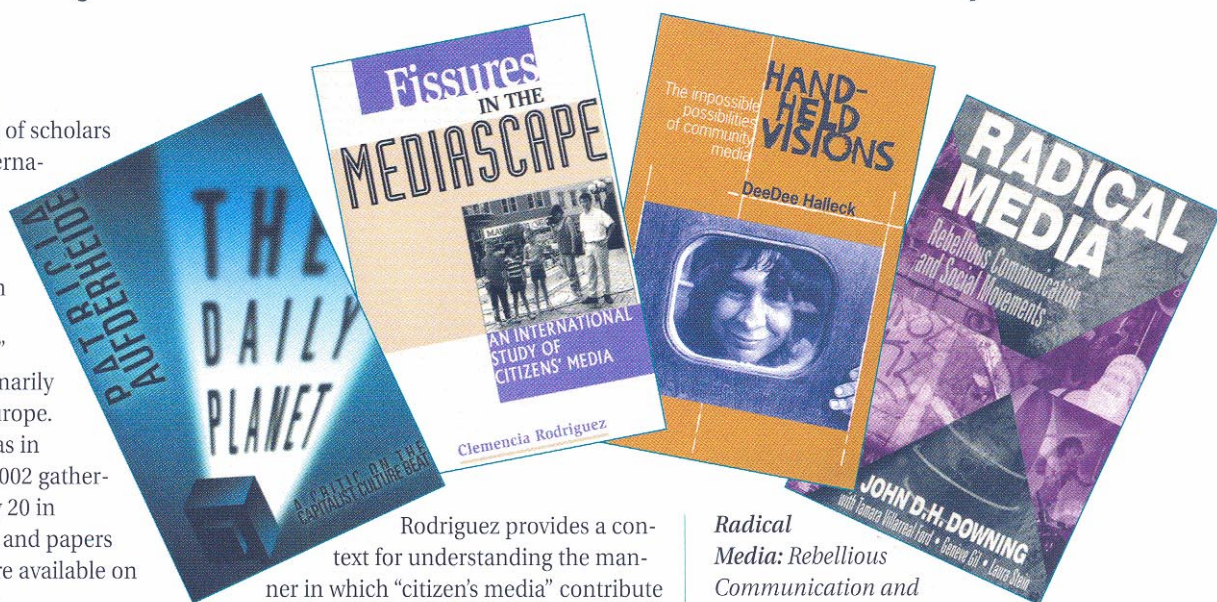
The Video Activist Handbook. 2nd ed., by Thomas Harding. London: Pluto Press, 1997.

Harding provides examples of video activism around the world, as well as skills and strategies for pursuing social change using video as a tool.

PUBLICATIONS

Community Media Review. 25th Anniversary Issue (24.2: Summer 2001). This issue of CMR, a publication of the Alliance for Community Media, highlights the 25th anniversary of the Alliance (formerly the National Federation of Local Cable Programmers). Historical and philosophically-oriented articles trace the roots of access in the U.S. and the continuing use of grassroots-based, democratic media in the struggle for a more equitable society. A must for everyone interested in the roots and current state of affairs of the community access video movement in the U.S.

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Which First Amendment...

continued from page 15

"individual right," rather than a social good, might be applied. Some producers include hard core violence and pornography within their shows, in part simply because "it's my right," and despite possible repercussions to the channel's existence.

In 1999, the Community Television Corporation, a non-profit community-based organization, took over management and operation of the public access channel and facilities. Prior to 1999, the corporate cable system operators who ran public access cultivated individual fiefdoms based on seniority, dominated by "first comers" who have insisted their rights include a lock on prized prime-time positions in the program schedule. This has been the legacy in San Francisco of the "individual rights" interpretation related to "first come, first served."

The CTC has begun to nurture values more in line with the basic concepts of access as understood by access facilities and access participants across the country: share resources, take your turn, move aside to help others take their turn, help others voice their ideas through this medium, enable viewers to see and hear a wide variety of shows and perspectives, build a grassroots community of "all of us" through the medium of television.

⁸ Similar perspectives on "more speech" seem to be held by some participants in the burgeoning Independent Media Center (IMC) movement, which includes a significant involvement of digital technologies to distribute alternative programming via the Internet and satellite television. The IMC movement started in Seattle in Fall 1999, giving a voice to global anti-corporate protests against the World Trade Organization. Since then, dozens of centers have been established across the world in concert with a renewed activist movement against globalization. See <http://www.indy-media.org>.

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John W. Higgins is an associate professor in the Department of Mass Communication at Menlo College. He is Vice President of the board of directors of the San Francisco Community Television Corporation (Access San Francisco) and a member of the editorial board of the *Community Media Review*. Email: jhiggins@menlo.edu

This article will be presented in a White Paper session at the 2002 national conference of the Alliance for Community Media in Houston, Texas.

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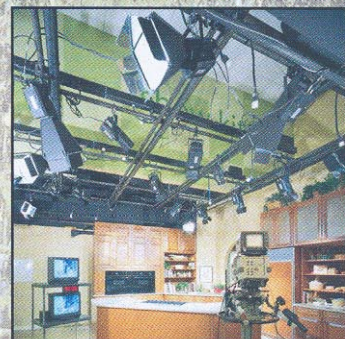
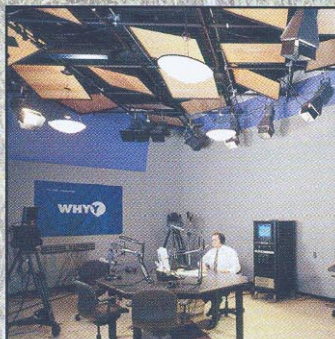
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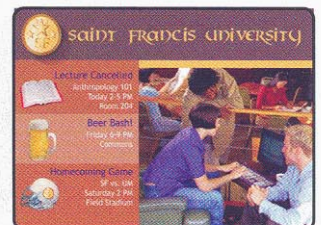
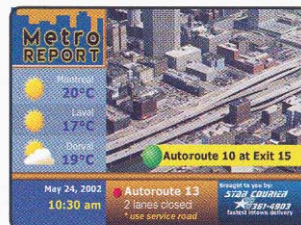
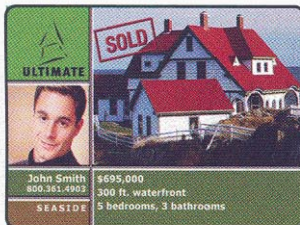
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